No. 565 OCTOBER 26, 1907 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Secrets Of A Haunted House

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.*

No. 565. NEW YORK, October 26, 1907. Price Five Cents.

Secrets of a Haunted House;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S FIGHT WITH GHOSTS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S RATTLED CLIENT.

"If you should drive your automobile to the uttermost end of Manhattan Island, and then turn about and follow the narrow lane you would find there—which, by the way, does not at all resemble a highway, although it is one—it would take you, in about ten minutes, to the house I am describing, Mr. Carter. It is a huge, brick house, and the bricks of which it is constructed were imported from England long before bricks were made in this country, and before it was supposed they could be made here. You will find many such houses in Virginia, and some few in Philadelphia, but I fancy this is the only one now standing on Manhattan Island."

"Very possibly. Go on, Mr. Sturtevant."

"That is the haunted house to which I have already referred."

"I guessed that much when you described it."

"You don't believe in haunted houses, Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, yes, I believe in haunted houses, all right," replied Nick, laughing.

"I mean ghost-haunted houses."

"No; I do not."

"I never did—until I went to live in this mansion; but, by jingo, this one has converted me!" And with this remark Roger Sturtevant leaned back in the chair he occupied in Nick Carter's study, and puffed moroselv at his cigar. His brows were wrinkled in perplexity, and he looked more angry than frightened by the recollection of his troubles.

"That's the house," he said again, presently, as the detective made no remark. "It makes me so hopping mad, so hot under the collar, Nick, when I think how I was let in for the thing, that I want to go out and shoot somebody. You see, old man, I have been literally driven out of it. That is, I haven't been driven out—yet; but, by jingo, I've got to get out, unless you can do something to 'lay' those ghosts."

"I am still in the dark about it, Roger," said the detective smilingly. "You seem to take it for granted that I am a mind reader, and that I know what you are thinking about. Absolutely all that you have told me since you entered this room, is that you have been led into the purchase of a house that is haunted; that ghosts walk there; that cold and clammy hands pat you on the face

when you are asleep in your bed at night; that strange noises disturb you; that lights flash up and disappear, always mysteriously; that you hear groans, and cries, and whimperings, and strange shuffling noises—and that because of it all you have got the 'weevles'; I think that was the expression you used."

"Well, you'd have 'em, too, if you had been through what I have since I bought that accursed place."

"Possibly; but let me hear the particulars."

"I suppose you'll laugh at me, Nick. It would be just like you."

"I suppose I will—in the end. I usually do laugh at tales about ghosts. But I'll promise to take you seriously—for the present, at least."

"If you'll do that——"

"I will."

"You and I played together when we were kids, Nick. We have punched each other in the eye a good many times, and we've had some pretty good scraps in our early youth, but all the same nothing has ever interfered with our friendship, eh?"

"Not that I am aware of, Roger."

"Well, by jingo, Nick, if you laugh at me about this before you have 'laid the ghost' our friendship ceases at that instant. So there!"

"All right, kid. That is what I used to call you, isn't it?"

"Yes; and it sounds good to hear it again, Nick, I don't want to be driven out of that old house. I like it, and, besides, there is a personal pride about the thing. I think Stanton sold me the place just because he thought I'd be driven out of it, you know."

"Who is Stanton?"

"Oh, he's one of the newly rich. His father has made several millions in the last year or two out at Goldfields, Nevada. The old man bought the place and started to fix it up, but he suddenly changed his mind and moved out, literally before he had moved in. I suppose it was because of the ghosts, although that doesn't appear in the deed."

"I suppose not."

"Then he gave it to his son Lemuel; that's Stanton—the one to whom I referred just now."

"Yes."

"Stanton started to do some more fixing up—and *he* quit too. Said he was tired of it, and all that. Never let on there were ghosts. Talked about the beauty of the old place, its antiquity and all that rot. And it is beautiful; there is no mistake about that."

"Well?"

"Well, then he buncoed me."

"How—buncoed you?"

"Got me to give him a cool quarter million dollars for the place, when all the time, confound him! he knew that I couldn't live in it. And it's dollars to doughnuts that he has been watching me and laughing in his sleeve ever since. Look here, Nick."

"Well?"

"You know that I'm no chicken-hearted mamma's boy, don't you?"

"Sure thing, Roger."

"I've got good biceps and a good nerve; never turned my back on a real danger in my life, and I don't remember that I ever turned tail and ran, either."

"Nor do I recall such a thing in the days when we knew each other well, kid. But I haven't known much about you since you inherited your father's several millions."

"They didn't change me a little bit, Nick. I'm just the same as I was before that."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I want you to know that I'm no more easily scared now than I used to be. I'd fight a windmill, if I thought the windmill needed a licking. You know that!"

"Yes."

"Well, those ghosts have got me rattled, Nick, and that's all about it. I have fought 'em for almost four weeks, now; but last night I threw up my hands, literally, and—slid out."

"Ran away, do you mean?"

"Literally ran away; out of the house. Didn't stop to leave by the door, either, but took a flyer through the window, with my valet after me, both of us in our pajamas. He fainted away, clean, when he struck the ground outside, and I didn't blame him any, either. I wished that I had done the same. But I picked him up and carried him across the lawn to the stable, where we awakened the groom and the coachman, and I waited there while Morris—that's my valet, you know—procured some clothes for me from my outfit at the club. And then——"

"Well, what then?"

"The whole blooming push of my establishment left me on the spot, without warning. Coachman, groom, stable-boy, chef—every servant I had, with the one exception of Morris. I don't know that I blame them any, either."

"Why not?"

"Every servant inside the house was tied down to the bed he occupied, and nearly dead with fright. We had to send the cook to Bellevue, thinking he had gone clean crazy, but they tell me over the 'phone that he'll pull through all right. The inside of the house looked as if it had been hit by a cyclone. Chairs were piled on top of tables; rugs were rolled up and tied as if for moving-day; the strings were cut out of my thousand dollar piano; books were pulled from the shelves in the library and hurled about the room, many of them ruined; pictures were torn and smashed; furniture was broken; and the very devil was to pay. It was simply awful!"

"All this that you have described happened last night?"

"Yes."

"And that is the condition in which you found the house when you returned to it, after you were driven out?"

"Yes. That is the condition into which the ghosts were putting the house when I *was* driven out. They were raising particular Cain. You'd have thought there was an earthquake going on, especially ordered for the occasion. It took me half an hour to brush my hair down straight this morning, it was so stiffened by the terror of last night."

"Did you *see* anything, as well as feel things?"

"*See anything?* Say! I saw things that would have made a psycopathic patient suppose he had swallowed a whole distillery. I shot 'em full of holes, too—and they only laughed at me for doing it. I threw vases at 'em, and the vases just simply smashed against the walls and never touched the ghosts. I fired off the contents of three revolvers. Oh, we had a merry time while it lasted."

"Your remarks sound as if you had done some of that wrecking yourself, Roger."

"I suppose I did; but I didn't do but a small part of it. I didn't cut the wires in my own piano; I didn't ruin my own books and pictures; I didn't roll the rugs together and tie them."

"What you really did was to jump out of the window, eh?"

"Just that. In my pajamas, too. I'm worth about twenty millions, Nick, and I'll cheerfully give up a couple of them to get even with those ghosts—and Stanton."

"The ghosts evidently did not hurt you physically, Roger."

"Didn't eh? I've got a stone-bruise on one of my feet as big as an egg."

"You did that yourself by jumping out of the window."

"Well, the ghosts made me jump out, didn't they?"

"You ought not to have jumped."

"Maybe not. All the same, I'd do it again. I wouldn't mind fighting a threshing machine with a lady's fan for a weapon, but when it comes to facing the devil himself, yours truly will take a back seat and look on, if it's all the same to you."

"Do you mean, Roger, that you are honestly frightened?"

"I do mean that."

"And you believe that ghosts have done the act?"

"No; I don't say that. But I don't believe—— Say, Nick, I don't know what I do believe, or don't believe. I'm up against it. I'm plumb scared—scared stiff; rattled; down and out. I haven't got a bluff left in me."

"Very well. If that is your condition, and you are willing to admit it, suppose now that you commence at the beginning and tell me the whole story, consecutively. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes."

"Then let's have it."

"All right, Nick. Here goes."

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Wait one moment, Roger," said the detective. "It is always well, as I just now intimated, when one has a story to tell, to be sure to commence at the beginning."

"Well, that is what I was intending to do."

"Perhaps you don't know where the beginning is, in this case. It begins with your acquaintance with Stanton—the man from whom you bought the place. By the way, what is the place called?"

"'The Poplars.'"

"I have heard of it, although I have never seen it. It is off any of the main thoroughfares of that part of the island, isn't it?"

"Decidedly. That's what I told you. I said it was on a lane which yet was not a lane."

"So you did. Go on."

"With Stanton?"

"Yes."

"He really has nothing whatever to do with it, you know, until I bought the place. I have known him—let me see—four or five years, I think. I suppose you want the particulars?"

"Yes."

"I made his acquaintance in a café in Paris. There was a row started, and I saw that an American was getting the worst of it. I lit into the crowd, knocked down two or three, and rescued Stanton. He was no end thankful to me, and all that, you know; swore that I had saved his life and a lot more rot of the sort. He joined our party, and we've been what is commonly called friends since that time."

"But the Nevada gold fields, where you say his father found his money, were not discovered at that time, Roger."

"Oh, well, that is a mere incident. I fancy there was some money in the outfit before that time. Anyhow, he seemed to have all he needed. Then suddenly, about a year ago, he broke out with more than he knew what to do with."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Trashy—but all right. Rather a good sort, you know. Vulgar at times, but—well, I have always rather liked him. He cuts in with a crowd that I don't tie to, at times; but I count that as none of my business, you know."

"How intimate have you been with him?"

"About as intimate as I am with any of that set who fill up the list of what I call acquaintance-friends."

"Does he belong to your clubs?"

"Yes; every one of them."

"Did you introduce him into any of them?"

"Not a blessed one. He got in always without my help, although I am free to say that I should not have hesitated to give it to him had he asked for it."

"I see."

"I really don't think that you need to attach any of the importance of this thing to him, Nick. Stanton's all right."

"Now tell me when you first became aware of the existence of the 'Poplars.'"

"Oh, I have known about the place ever since I have owned an automobile. I ran past it one day long ago and admired it from the road, you know. I always had a predilection for old places of the sort. They attract me."

"You mentioned the fact, I suppose?"

"What fact?"

"That you had seen the place and admired it?"

"Yes. Of course."

"To Stanton, among others?"

"I suppose so. I don't remember particularly as to that."

"And I suppose you took some of your friends past the place afterward, to show it to them—from the road, eh?"

"Yes, often."

"Ever take Stanton?"

"Yes, two or three times. But, I say, Nick, what the deuce has all that got to do with——"

"We will come to that later. Can you recall the time when you first took Stanton to exhibit the old place to him?"

"Why, yes. It was——"

"Wait. When was it in relation to the time when Stanton's father purchased it?"

"Ummm. I should say, to the best of my recollection, that it was about a month after that, when Stanton told me one day that his gov'nor had bought the place and was fixing it up to beat the band. I was hot about it too. It had never occurred to me to try to buy the place, notwithstanding my great admiration for it. I hadn't even inquired as to the name of the owner; but I suddenly discovered that I wanted it myself."

"And I suppose you made an offer for it on the spot, eh?"

"I think I did."

"Tell me what you said, if you can remember."

"I said to Stanton that I had always wanted the place, although I had never made any effort to buy it, and that I would give his father five thousand for his bargain, no matter what he had paid for it."

"What did he say?"

"He said he'd put it up to the old man. Later he told me that it wasn't for sale."

"Upon which you began to admire it more and more, eh?"

"Yes."

"Now, what is the history of your relations to that place after that? But, wait; had you ever been inside the house up to that time?"

"I hadn't even been inside the grounds. I had only driven past it, sometimes stopping the car for a moment in front of it, to admire it."

"But now that it had fallen into the possession of a friend, you visited it, didn't you?"

"Not at once, Nick," and Sturtevant smiled as he admitted this. "You see, for some reason which I could not guess, the Stantons chose to be very mysterious about the place."

"Exactly. That is what I half expected you to tell me. Now, to return to the history of your association with it."

"I think, Nick, if it is all the same to you, that you had better keep on questioning me. I don't catch the drift of what you want to know, and perhaps you will get at the meat of the thing much quicker if you do it in your own way."

"All right."

"You see, when Stanton told me that his father had bought the place, I suddenly remembered that I had never seen it nearer than the road, and so I said to him presently, 'All right, old man, we'll go up and have a look at it this afternoon. I have always wanted to see the inside of that house, but never thought about it seriously till now.'"

"And what was his reply?"

"He shook his head in a funny way, and told me that the old man had warned him off the place himself. That his gov'nor had some sort of romantic plan about it, and was going to have a lot of work done to it before he permitted anybody to see it."

"Of course, that whetted your curiosity?"

"I should say it did."

"Did you ask again if you could see the inside of the house?"

"Not for a long time—but I did, finally."

"And still you were denied?"

"Yes."

"In what terms?"

"Flatly."

"Do you suppose you could quote to me in the exact language—what young Stanton said to you in response to your request?"

"I think I could."

"Try it."

"He said: 'No use, old chap. The gov'nor won't permit it.'

"'What's the matter with him?' I asked."

"'He has got some kind of a bee in his bonnet about that place,' he told me. 'Wants to reproduce it just as his fancy pictures how it used to be, and all that. He has got a gang of workmen in there now and he won't let even me inside the place; not as far as inside the gate; but he will give a house-warming as soon as he is ready, and then we can see it to our heart's content.'"

The detective nodded significantly, and he smiled, too, as if those words of his friend had cleared a part of the horizon for his investigations.

"I suppose," he said presently, "that the longer this sort of thing continued—that is, the longer you were kept out of the place, the more eager you became to see it; no?"

"Sure thing."

"And that you made more than one request to be permitted to do so?"

"I made many. I even proposed once that Stanton and I should go there in secret, and look the place over. But he told me that it was out of the question. Said that the old man kept an armed guard around it and that we would be shot. We used to guy Stanton about it for a time, and then it got to be an old story. I think it was finally forgotten by all save myself. And then I went abroad again and stayed there."

"Until you returned to buy the place?"

"Yes."

"When was that and how was it?"

"Why, I met Stanton in Paris again. I hadn't seen him for a long time, and one of the first things that he told me was that——"

"Wait a moment. Quote him, if you can."

"He said, after greeting me and after we had talked about other things for a time, 'I say, Sturtevant, that old place—the "Poplars," you know, belongs to me now.'

"'You don't say so!' I exclaimed in reply; and I asked him how that had come about.

"'You would never believe it,' he replied. 'I don't anyhow.'

"'Don't believe what?' I asked him, and he replied:

"'The old man came to me one day and said he was going to sell the place and told me to tell you that it was in the market for what it had cost him, including the repairs and improvements, of course.' Then he went on to tell how surprised he was about it, for the old man had made a hobby of fixing it up to suit him, and had said that he would never part with it as long as he lived, and all that."

"Yes. Well?"

"He said then: 'I told him that I liked the place myself, and asked him to give it to me, but at first the gov'nor refused utterly even to consider such a thing. He told me that I didn't want it and that I wouldn't keep it if I had it, and finally he told me what was the matter. And what do you think it was, Sturtevant?' he asked me.

"'I haven't an idea,' I told him.

"'The old man says the place is haunted.'

"Of course I laughed at that, and so did he. We had a good laugh together about it, for young Stanton had never seen the inside of the place at that time."

"At least that is what he told you," corrected Nick.

"Yes. That is what he told me."

"Did you offer to buy it of him on the spot?"

"I did."

"And what was his reply to that?"

"He refused. He said that he had never owned a haunted house, and he wanted to see what one was like."

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOSTS OF THE OLD HOUSE REAPPEAR.

"So you could not bargain with him on the spot, eh?" asked the detective.

"No."

"Nor even make a tentative arrangement?"

"No."

"He appeared to like the idea of owning a haunted house, did he?"

"Immensely."

"What did he say about the haunted part of it? What did he tell you that his father had said about it?"

"He didn't give me much satisfaction about that. He led me to think that the old man hadn't really told him much about it himself. The idea I finally got about it was that there had been strange noises and the suggestion of spooks about the place, but that their presence was due more to the nervousness and superstition of Stanton's father than to anything else. I thought it was all in his eye, don't you know; and so did Stanton himself, apparently."

"Exactly. That was precisely the impression he sought to give you, evidently."

"Eh?"

"Never mind my comments. Go on."

"There isn't any more to say at present, that I see."

"You continued to talk about the place with him, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What more was said?"

"Oh, a little about ghosts and such things. A lot about haunted houses. We didn't either of us believe that a house in little old New York could be haunted. In England or Germany, it was all right, for every really respectable old mansion and castle over there has its ghost, you know; but here in New York, the idea was preposterous. We agreed to that, I remember."

"Certainly."

"Stanton finally told me this. He said: 'Tell you what,

Sturtevant; the old place is mine now. The old man gave it to me, hook, line, bob, and sinker. I've got a deed of it safely stowed away; and when he gave me the deed he told me that I wouldn't keep it long. He begged me not to go there to live, and I told him that I was not likely to do so, at least, until I had a wife to take there with me. I told him that I was not like you, old chap, to want to keep bachelor's hall in such a God-forsaken hole as that. And he seemed real pleased. I do think, Sturtevant, that the gov'nor was scared stiff. But I'll tell you what I'll do.'

"'What?' I asked him.

"'I'll sell it to you after I have tried it for a while, just to see if there are really ghosts there, you know. If there are none, I'll sell it for what it cost the old man; but if there should happen to be a few choice spooks about the place, I'll charge you extra for each one, according to their individual excellence.' At which we both laughed heartily, of course."

"Naturally. What then?"

"After that we went about together all over Europe, looking for haunted houses and castles. We found a lot of 'em, too, only we didn't see any of the spooks. They weren't on exhibition. You could only see the rooms and the towers and things they were supposed to inhabit. The ghosts themselves did not show up. But, anyhow, we read about 'white ladies' and 'bloody knights' and all that rot, and went to see them. We hired a courier to look up such places for us and afterward to take us to them—and then we returned to America together."

"And then—when you returned to New York with young Stanton—were you permitted to see the inside of the place you so much admired?"

"Sure."

"Stanton took you there, did he?"

"Yes."

"Did it come up to your expectations?"

"More than that. It is really a wonderfully beautiful old place. I haven't succeeded in giving you an idea about it."

"Let us get down to facts now."

"All right."

"You visited the house almost at once after your return to New York?"

"Within a few days—about a week, I think it was."

"What time of day was your first visit?"

"About ten in the morning."

"You went there with young Stanton?"

"Yes."

"Just you two alone?"

"Yes."

"See any ghosts?"

"Not a sign of one. Not a sound came to our ears. The old place was as peaceful as a church."

"You were favorably impressed with it?"

"I fell more in love with it than ever. Did it on the spot, too. Offered to buy it again, then and there, and Stanton refused, at least, until he had owned it for a time. He laughingly said that he wanted to find out if there were ghosts there for which he could charge a price. I remember that he reminded me that his old man was an intensely practical old chap and that he wouldn't cry 'Ghosts!' unless there was some reason for doing it; and he added that he wasn't going to dispose of a choice selection of spirits until he knew something about their quality."

"Tell me about the inside of the house itself."

"It was beautiful—it is beautiful, Nick. There is nothing else like it in New York. You see, Stanton's father had gone to no end of pains in fixing it up. He had reproduced an old 'Baronic Hall' effect perfectly. He carried out the idea throughout the place. When you walk into that house you think you are stepping back again into the Middle Ages, and, while there is every modern improvement ready at hand, they are so perfectly concealed or are so absolutely in keeping with the rest of the surroundings, that you don't realize they are there."

"I see."

"I was so charmed with the place that I offered at once to take it off his hands for twice the figure it had cost; but he wouldn't have it. He wanted to test that ghost business first."

"So you came away from that call, more charmed with the place than ever, eh?"

"I certainly did."

"When was the next time you visited it?"

"The night of the second day following."

"How was that?"

"Stanton had told me that he was going there that night, to sleep in the house, and that he had decided to go alone. He wasn't even going to take his valet with him. I was hot at that—I mean at the idea of his not taking me, don't you see?"

"Yes."

"I reminded him that we had gone all over Europe investigating haunted houses, and begged him to take me with him that night."

"And he finally consented, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all about it."

"There isn't anything to tell about it, save that we stayed in the house that night, with nobody with us at all. There wasn't a sign of a ghost. We passed the night in the big dining-room, with armored warriors all about us—that is, the warriors weren't inside the armor, you know."

"I understand."

"There wasn't a sign of a ghost. We sat up all night that night. I slept the latter part of it in my chair. So

did Stanton. In the morning we both felt rather sheepish about the whole affair, for we had both expected to see and hear blood-curdling things."

"Naturally."

"And there wasn't a thing."

"What did you do then?"

"We decided that it must have been the ghosts' night off, and resolved to try it again. We shook hands on an agreement to stay there in that house night after night until we saw or heard something in the shape of ghosts, or until we were satisfied that there was no such thing there."

"Well."

"The second night we passed in the library, again without taking off our clothes; but I slept like a brick all night on a couch."

"And no ghosts were about, eh?"

"Nary a ghost."

"The third night—what of that?"

"I went to bed in one of the guest chambers, and he occupied the room that his father had fitted up for himself."

"Did you see any ghosts that night?"

"I didn't; but Stanton swore that he had seen and heard things, although he couldn't at all describe what they were like. 'Just things,' he said they were; and the result was that the next night I begged him to let me occupy that room."

"Did he do that?"

"Certainly."

"And did you see ghosts then?"

"Nary a ghost. I slept like a top till morning. Well, Nick, to make a long story somewhat short, we spent two weeks in that house—that is, we slept there every night and spent a good part of the days there, too; at least I did; and never once did I see or hear anything that could suggest to the most powerful imagination that the place was haunted."

"Then, I suppose, you renewed your offer to buy the place, didn't you?"

"I certainly did. I added a good tidy sum to the other offers, too."

"And were refused."

"I was. Stanton said that he had fallen in love with the place himself. He promised me, however, that he would try it for a time, and that after a little perhaps he would sell. He went so far as to agree that I should have the first call on it, if he did sell it."

"And now, I suppose, your real story begins, doesn't it?"

"Not quite yet. I went away then, for a trip, and was gone three months—a little more than that, in fact. It was when I returned, after my return—that the real story begins."

"In the meantime I suppose Stanton had gone to live in his house, hadn't he?"

"He had; and had been driven out of it."

"By the ghosts, of course."

"What else was there to drive him out of it, I'd like to know?"

"That is what I'd like to know also. I suppose you saw Stanton almost at once, upon your return after the three months' absence, didn't you?"

"No. He was out of town, too, when I got back. He came in about a week later. I had left word for him at the club that I wanted to see him at once; and when I did see him—*Say!*"

"Well?"

"He looked like a ghost himself—or rather as if he had seen one. And he had! Seen scores of 'em! I didn't believe it then; but I do now—'cause why? Because I have seen them myself. That's why!"

CHAPTER IV.

GHOSTS WHIP A PRIZE-FIGHTER AND A COP.

The detective reached out for a fresh cigar, lighted it, and then sank back against the cushions again.

"Go on," he said laconically.

"Nick, may I interpolate something just here?" asked Sturtevant.

"Anything you like. Yes."

"I don't for the life of me see what you want all these particulars about Stanton for. I came to you because a house that I own happens to be possessed by something which I choose to call ghosts, and at once you steer me way off the track, and want the family history of the Stantons. I don't see the point of it at all, but I suppose you do."

"Yes; I see it."

"Well, I am getting a little impatient to relate my own thrilling tale."

"We will have that in good time. In the meantime go ahead with young Stanton."

"His story was in substance that he had gone to the old house to live as soon as I went away. He had taken his valet with him, naturally, and a few other servants. At first all went as smoothly as it had when I was there with him, and then, of a sudden, things began to happen. They happened to the servants first."

"How happened?"

"Well, the first thing was that his cook went to him and told him that he wouldn't sleep another night in the house if it were given to him, and a pot of ducats, besides. Asked why, he said the place was haunted. Asked to tell about it, he said that things entered his room at night, no matter how securely he barred his door, or what he placed against it. That his bed rocked

like a ship at sea; that hands touched him, and a lot more of the same sort."

"He left?"

"That hour. He wouldn't remain another minute. Before the day was over, Stanton's valet was the only servant left in the house."

"And stables?"

"No; they had seen no ghosts out there, as yet."

"I don't suppose you talked personally with any of those servants, did you?"

"No; only with the valet."

"Well, come down to Stanton himself. He is the only one who interests me."

"Stanton resolved to brave the thing out——"

"Wait a moment. You needn't try to quote him exactly, but I do want you to tell me in substance, as nearly as you can, exactly what he said."

"I will."

"Go on, then."

"He made up his mind to brave the thing out if he had to stay in the blooming old house all alone—and that same night he heard the worst screeching and yelling all about the place that he had ever heard in his life. It was as if a dozen people were being murdered all at once, he told me. Chains rattled across the floors; furniture was pushed over, and all sorts of things happened, although nothing occurred in his own room."

"Didn't he try to find out what was going on in the other rooms?"

"Yes. But the moment he approached the places from which noises had sounded, they ceased. When he got back to his own room, after one of those excursions, he found that the ghosts had been there, but in no case did they show themselves to him personally."

"Well?"

"During this time he had heard or seen nothing of his valet, so he went to his man's room—and found him tied to his bed, with a rope that Stanton was quite sure did not belong on the place. The valet was unconscious, scared stiff; had fainted, you know."

"Yes. Go on."

"Stanton released him, and the valet would hardly wait to dress himself before he left the house. He went out as soon as he was dressed, and although he remained in Stanton's service, no amount of urging could induce him to enter that house again."

"Did Stanton stay the night out himself?"

"No. He went out with the valet. They left it together; but Stanton returned the next night; and he took with him a fellow named Shorty McCabe; maybe you know him; he's a chum of Sewel Ford, the writer."

"Yes; I have heard of him," replied Nick dryly. "He's a great character, too."

"You're right, he is! And a fighter from way back."

"There is no doubt of that. What did Shorty do?"

"According to Stanton, he punched holes in the ghoses that would have made 'em look like sieves if they had been human. Anyhow, they couldn't scare him."

"I should hope not."

"Shorty allowed that he had never seen a man who could lick him, and he'd like to meet the ghost that would try it on. Well, Shorty met him, all right, all right."

"Tell me about it."

"Shorty spent two nights there, with Stanton, and, as I say, punched holes in the ghosts—or punched at them, anyhow, with no effect. The ghosts swatted Shorty on the face, pinched him, stuck needles into him, and otherwise offended his dignity. He told Stanton that their methods weren't according to rules; worse than French savate, he said they were. He didn't like it a little bit."

"Can't you give me particulars?"

"No; only that the ghosts came to Shorty and Stanton, same as they had to others. They sported around the place as if they owned it, broke up the furniture, flashed lights, blue and red and green and yellow, also white, I suppose; shouted, swore, groaned, moaned, sang, cursed, and otherwise disported themselves to beat the band—or several bands."

"And Shorty left?"

"Yes; he said he had to go into training, and loss of sleep was the worst thing that could happen to him. He said that if it weren't for the noise the ghosts made, he would enjoy having them around, but under all the circumstances—well, he begged to be excused."

"After the third night, eh?"

"Yes. After the first night he remembered an engagement in Chicago, and thought he ought to keep it; after the second one, he recalled two more that were crying for him; and after the third one, that training-stunt got on his nerves so that he couldn't possibly wait another minute."

"Shorty was game, though; eh?"

"To the limit. He said that if it was a mere question of reducing weight with him, he couldn't think of a better place than that house to do it—only that he might lose it too fast."

"Anyhow, they didn't catch the ghosts, did they?"

"No; but the ghosts caught them, all right, according to Stanton."

"I don't suppose you have seen Shorty himself, have you?"

"No. He took a trip abroad somewhere. He said that he was going to train on shipboard. The fact is that Shorty was scared himself, you see."

"Yes."

"Then Stanton didn't know what to do; but at last he applied to the police commissioner, and secured leave of absence for a big, husky cop, off the Broadway squad. Stanton says that the cop is running yet. He didn't stay the night out, according to him."

"And all this time hadn't they done anything to Stanton himself?"

"Oh, yes. They had taken him in with the others. They had tossed him around his room as if he were a feather pillow; they had bound him to his bed with ropes; they had passed wet hands across his face; they had rung bells, fired pistols, and done other pleasant little things of that sort. The only reason why he didn't leave that night, with the cop, was that he was tied down, and couldn't."

"How did he get loose finally?"

"He woke up out of a dead faint in the morning, to find that they had untied him, and that he was all right. The daylight gave him courage, too, he said. He went all through the house alone—and after he had done that he went out of it, locked the door after him, and he has not reentered it since."

"So that's the end of his part of it—until you bought the place, isn't it?"

"Practically."

"Did he tell you all this before you made the purchase?"

"Almost all of it."

"About Shorty and the cop; and all that?"

"Yes."

"Did you see the cop?"

"Yes. I looked him up."

"What did he have to say about it?"

"Just what I have told you."

"Was he really scared?"

"*Scared!* He was reduced to a frazzle; and he is as tall as Pat Giblin, too."

"Pat has left the force. He is somewhere in Binghampton now. He wouldn't have run, if Stanton had got him."

"I think he would. I think you will, in the end."

"Possibly. I haven't started yet, however. Now tell me about the purchase itself. After hearing all these things were you as keen as ever to buy the place?"

"More so. To tell you the truth, Nick, I was as skeptical as you are. I believed all the time that it was somehow a plant. Stanton is a fellow who likes sensations, and I thought, among other things, that he might be working up one."

"That reminds me. How does it happen that none of this ever got into the papers?"

"Stanton paid the bunch handsomely to keep it quiet."

"And you have done the same, I suppose?"

"I have."

"Go ahead about the purchase."

"Well, I offered again to buy the place, ghosts and all and Stanton refused point-blank to sell it."

Nick nodded, as if he had expected this announcement.

"He said to me: 'What's the use of your buying it? You'll only have the old Jonah on your hands, and you'll be out just what you pay for it. As it stands now, neither of us is out a cent, for the old man gave it to me.'

"All the same, I told him that I would buy it, and he finally said he'd think about it, but it wasn't until I had raised the offer again. I paid a quarter of a million cash for it. It is worth less than half that; but I will do Stanton the justice to say that he held back till the very last; and even when we met to make the transfer of papers—after I had laid the money on the table, and he had signed and acknowledged the deed, he offered to tear it up and return the money if I would say the word."

"Stanton evidently knows you quite well, Roger."

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"That he knew mighty well that you would never go back on a bargain you had once made."

"I suppose so. Anyhow, I wanted the place, and right then, at that moment, he couldn't have had it back again if he had raised me half a million."

"What will you take for it to-day?"

"I wouldn't sell it at any price."

"You don't want to return there to live in the house, do you?"

"I certainly do, Nick. And I mean to do it some time, too."

"Good! I think it more than likely that you will. I suppose you want me to go there, and sleep in the house a few nights, don't you?"

"I want you to solve this riddle—if you can. Yes."

CHAPTER V.

TERRORS OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Now tell me about your own experiences in the house, after you purchased it," said the detective, while Sturtevant helped himself to a fresh cigar.

"Well, as soon as the place was mine, and I knew that nobody could get it away from me, I felt like a two-year-old colt turned out to pasture for the first time. The world was mine, and I wasn't any more afraid of ghosts than I was of my own shadow. In fact, way down in my secret heart, notwithstanding the evidence I had heard, I didn't believe in them at all."

"Go on."

"I called Morris, my valet, to me; but hold on a minute; I am geting ahead of my story. First I said to Stanton: 'Don't you want to go there and sleep in the house with me to-night?'

"'Not on your life,' he replied. 'I wouldn't do it for a million.'

"Then I asked him who knew about the business of the ghosts, and he swore that he had not told a soul save those who had been to the house with him—those whom I have already mentioned. He said he had paid

them liberally to keep silent, and he knew they had done so."

"Well?"

"Then I went home and rang for Morris. When he came I told him about the whole thing. I didn't leave out a detail that I had heard, and at the finish I asked him if he had the sand to stay in the house with me, and I told him that I didn't want him to go there with me at all unless he was determined to see it through."

"And he went?"

"He did."

"Morris is a faithful servant, I suppose?"

"He is as faithful as a dog. He said he'd see it through, and that he wouldn't leave till I did—and he didn't."

"Go on."

"We went to the house that same night, and we passed as peaceful a night as you could imagine. Not a thing happened, and in the morning we laughed at the whole thing. We didn't go to bed until toward three in the morning, and then I went to the room I had selected for my own—the same rooms that old Stanton had originally fixed up for himself; and say, they are dreams!"

"Well?"

"I slept like a top. So did Morris in his room, which is handy to my suite, and is really a part of it."

"Yes."

"You know, I bought the house just as it was, with everything in it, so all that I had to take to the place was my wearing-apparel."

"Yes."

"Morris didn't wake me till about nine o'clock. Then he called me, and we laughed over the ghost-stories. Neither of us had seen or heard a thing to suggest them."

"Well?"

"During the day we roamed about the place, while I made suggestions about certain changes I wanted made and things I wished done. He prepared my breakfast, and the other meals I got at the club. I hadn't got so far as engaging servants yet."

"I suppose not."

"I wanted to see something of the ghosts before I did that. Well, Nick, I didn't see them or hear them. Neither did Morris. Everything in that place was as peaceful as a prayer-meeting. There was nothing doing—and that kept up for a week."

"For a whole week there was not a suggestion of a haunted house about the place?"

"Not one. We almost forgot about the ghosts, in the meantime, and when the week was up I told Morris to look about him for some servants. I wanted to set up an establishment. The house is so fine that I wanted to entertain there; to show it off, you know."

"Yes."

"I had established my chauffeur in the stable—there is a garage, too, you know—and now Morris had some of the horses brought there, and the other car, too. With them came the regular servants. Then we had in a chef, and a footman, and all the rest of it, you know, to make up a complete establishment; eh?"

"Yes."

"No women. Three Japs did that part of the work; and after we had literally set up housekeeping, two more weeks of perfect quiet came and went."

"And no ghosts?"

"No ghosts. Not one, or a sign of one. And then the first thing happened."

"What was that?"

"It was more funny than frightful. Morris came in to wake me one morning, as usual, although rather late. It was almost ten; but I had retired late, and was sleepy. I told him to prepare my bath and lay out a certain suit for me, and then to leave me alone for another half-hour. He did that. It was exactly half an hour later when he came to call me, and I got out of bed and went to the bathroom. When I returned to my room from there, I looked about me for my clothes. They weren't there, Nick.

"I was quite sure that I had noticed them before I left the room, but supposed that Morris had taken them away again, for some reason. The only strange thing about that idea was that there weren't any of them there. Well, I rang for him, and he came. I asked him what in the world he had done with my clothes, and he started to reply, and then discovered that they weren't there, and he stared, open-mouthed, at the place where he had left them."

"Do you mean that they had been taken away while you were in the bath?"

"They had disappeared—and what's more, they have never been seen since; not a sign of them. They were gone, hook, line, bob, and sinker. Clothes and underclothing, shirt and tie, shoes—the whole bunch had disappeared. We spent the best part of an hour looking for them, and at last I put on something else.

"'First blood for the ghosts,' I told Morris, with a laugh; but he looked rather solemn.

"After that, for several days, the only evidences we had of the presence of mysterious forces around the place was the frequent disappearance of things. I couldn't put anything down anywhere in the house and leave it for a moment but it would disappear. A cigar, a cigarette, a card-case, a pair of gloves—it was all the same. It became annoying."

"I should imagine so. Were they always taken away for good? Were the things never found again?"

"Oh, that happened only in the case of the clothes, the first time. After that, whatever disappeared was al-

ways found again later somewhere else—in some other part of the house, or, at least, in a different room."

"Did you never see or hear the agency that removed those things?"

"Never once, at that time."

"Go on."

"Morris began to get uneasy. So did I. It was uncanny. But he didn't lose his courage. We both went about the house armed, and prepared to shoot the first thing that showed itself that didn't belong there."

"Were the other servants visited in like manner?"

"No. We were the only ones molested. As yet, the servants had heard nothing and seen nothing; and you may be sure that we said nothing."

"I suppose not."

"This sort of thing kept up for some time, only that the ghosts became bolder as time advanced. I continue to call them ghosts, for want of a better epithet."

"I know. Go on."

"Then Morris and I began to hear noises. The first that I heard was the sound of a guitar. It seemed to be played in the adjoining room, too, and I went in there, thinking that perhaps Morris had one that I had never known about. There was nobody in the room, and Morris was asleep in his own."

"And then?"

"I returned to my bed, with the thought that if it was merely a guitar, I would not be very greatly disturbed. That night I was awakened again, long after that, by feeling a hand brush across my face, and I leaped out of bed as if a pin had been stuck into me."

"Find anything?"

"Not a thing. I turned on the lights and searched the room. Everything was as I had left it, and after a while I returned to bed, with the lights still going—and dropped asleep again. I think it was about an hour after that, when the door of my room was thrown violently open, and a heavy body was flung through it, wrapped in bed-clothing."

"There was still a light in your room, you say?"

"Yes; but I saw nothing, only as I have described it. The bundle on the floor squirmed and struggled, and presently unrolled itself, for it was alive. It was Morris."

"Morris, eh?"

"Yes. He had been pulled from his bed, wrapped in his own bed-clothing before he could offer any resistance or could see a thing, and was then carried and flung bodily into my room."

"Didn't that scare him?"

"I think he was madder than he was frightened. I had to reprove him for swearing in my presence. Really." And Sturtevant laughed heartily.

"I don't blame him."

"I didn't, either. We didn't sleep any more that night; but it was near morning, anyhow; and with the lights turned on we made another thorough search; but you might as well search the palm of your hand for a ghost.

"When I descended to my breakfast, the butler told me that he had received a letter from his home in England, and that he would have to return there at once, as one of his relatives was very ill, indeed. He hoped that I would excuse him for not giving a month's notice, but he would really like to leave that day. His face was white and drawn, and he looked as if he had had a rough time of it."

"He had seen ghosts, too, I suppose."

"He hadn't seen any, but the bed-clothing had been dragged off him three times during the night. He was afraid he might catch cold, I suppose, if that sort of thing kept up. I persuaded him to remain another day, at least, and to put an extra bolt on his door. But he departed the next morning, before I was up, leaving a note of apology for me, and asking me to please send his money to him at an address he gave. I sent it. I didn't blame him, for I had gone through an experience myself that night."

"What sort of one?"

"A pail of water was turned over me while I slept. It wasn't pleasant. I was madder than a wet hen about it."

"Naturally."

"And when Morris was awakened by a loud 'meouwing' in his room, he found that a dead cat was stretched on the second pillow of the bed."

"Pleasant. But all this time you had not *seen* anything, eh?"

"No. We had only felt them and heard them. We had seen nothing. But it was evident that the ghosts were beginning to get in their work in fine shape. Morris was getting nervous, and I was getting mad."

"Weren't you scared yet?"

"No. Honestly. I was only mad. I did not believe in ghosts, and I did believe that it was all a 'plant,' as I said before. I was praying that I might see something, and I made up my mind that, when the next night came, I would retire as usual, but that I would remain awake, although in the dark, and be ready for the ghosts when they appeared. I did it, too."

"See anything then?"

"You shall hear."

CHAPTER VI.

A SKELETON DOES A CAKE-WALK.

"It all seems very funny to look back upon, Nick," said Sturtevant, continuing. "I suppose it sounds so, too. While I tell about it, I cannot help wondering what you would have been doing all this time had you been in my place. I really don't believe that you would have done so very differently."

"Possibly not, Roger. One can never tell what one will do under given conditions until one is confronted by those same conditions. But go ahead with your story. You must be getting near the end of it now."

"I am. There isn't much more. I think I left myself lying in bed in the dark, with my eyes open and a loaded revolver in my hand, didn't I?"

"You didn't mention the gun, but I supposed it was there."

"Bet your life it was there! Much good it did, though!"

"Well, go on from there."

"I prepared myself for bed the same as usual, in case any of the ghosts should be spying about, you know, to get onto the preparations I was making; and I didn't turn in till after midnight. But then, when I had doused the glim and had climbed into bed, I laid on my back, and kept my eyes open, while I held the pistol ready for instant use. I'm a fair shot, too, Nick, and reasonably quick with a gun.

"There wasn't any sound in the room at all for a long time, and then I heard a sliding noise, as if somebody were slowly pulling a chair across the rug without lifting the legs from the floor, but I couldn't see anything. It was as dark as a pocket in the room."

"Why didn't you shoot at the sound?"

"What—and scare away the ghosts before I had heard anything? No; I didn't want to do that. At least, not as yet. So I waited."

"Well?"

"The scraping sound continued, and then I was nearly knocked senseless by a chair that was hurled upon the bed from somewhere in the dark. It hit me on the head and arm, and knocked the pistol from my grasp; but I recovered myself almost instantly, and succeeded in grasping the pistol again the first time I reached for it.

"Just as I seized it, I heard a loud laugh; a 'Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!' repeated seven times; and at the instant I heard the sound there came a flash of light, and I saw a figure, not in white, but all blood-red, standing near the foot of my bed. It was the figure of a giant, too. Seven feet if it was an inch, with horns on the head, like pictures of the devil you have seen. Understand what I mean?"

"Yes."

"I haven't a doubt that there were hoofs and tail, too, although I didn't take time to examine just then, for I let drive with that gun—two chambers of it. Say, Nick!"

"What?"

"If you should stand up there before me now, and let your body fall to the floor without a particle of restraint placed upon it, you would make just such a sound as I heard then, following upon the report of my pistol. It was the sound of a body crashing to the floor all in a heap; and that was followed by a loud groan; then a sigh; and then all was still.

"It scared me, Nick, worse than the other things had done. I thought I had killed a man, and, not being accustomed to that sort of amusement, it flabbergasted me for a minute.

"I was all of a tremble, but I sat still and listened, hearing nothing, not a sound; and gradually I pulled myself together. I began to wonder whom I had shot. I thought of all the friends I had in the city who might have been playing these jokes upon me. It was a long time before I found courage to reach around near the head of the bed where the electric switch is located, and turn it on.

"Gee! You will never know what relief that flood of light in the room brought to me. My nerve returned with it, and I leaped from the bed and ran around past the foot of it, expecting to find the body of the man I had shot, weltering in his gore, right there.

"Say—there wasn't any man and there wasn't any gore! There wasn't anything at all, and I stood there, staring at the vacant spot where I had expected to find a dead man, as if I were suddenly petrified."

"You hadn't hit anything, after all, eh?"

"Yes, I had, though. I had sent a bullet plumb through the center of the forehead of a photograph of Lemuel Stanton, that stood on my dresser, between two of the windows. It went on through the dresser, of course; but that was all I hit.

"When I had quite recovered from the shock of not finding anything—it was rather worse than it would have

been if I had found a dead body there, I think—I began to look around the room. It was then that I discovered that I had hit the photograph."

"What else did you find?"

"Nothing else. I had, that day, placed new bolts on the door into the hall, and on each of the other doors, with the one exception of the one which communicates with the entry that leads to the room Morris occupied. The bolts had not been touched, apparently.

"Then I began to think it strange that Morris had not heard my shot, and rushed to the room to assist me, and I screwed up courage to go to him. I found him, all right."

"You mean, I suppose, that you did not find him all right?"

"I found him tied up in bed; tied so that he was in a sitting-posture, and directly in front of him, on the counterpane, was a polished human skull, grinning at him. Morris was unconscious. He had fainted. I forgot to say that his lights were turned on, also.

"When I had cut him loose and brought him around to consciousness, he told me about it.

"He said that he was asleep, when he was startled awake by feeling something against his face. He tried to start up, but a cord had been stretched across his throat, so that the moment he moved, or tried to raise his head, it choked him.

"It was all dark around him, but he could hear moving forms near him. He could feel hands passing all over him, and those hands presently tied him. Then he was moved up in the bed, so that he was in a sitting-posture, and then the lights were turned on, and he saw the skull."

"And then he fainted, I suppose?"

"That's the size of it."

"Well, the hands that touched him weren't ghost hands, were they? They were human hands, weren't they?"

"He said they were hands. That was all he knew about it."

"What did you do then?"

"I told him to come with me to my room, and that we would pass the rest of the night together, with the lights turned on, and see what we could see—and when we got back to my own room it was all dark. Mr. Ghost had turned off the lights during my absence."

"You turned them on again?"

"Naturally—to find that nearly every chair in the room had been piled on top of my bed, and that the doors were still bolted on the inside."

"They are a merry set of ghosts, at least," said the detective, smiling.

"Merry! Say, they would make a circus clown appear like a funeral-procession. Oh, they are merry, all right, and they raise merry—you know; eh?"

"Yes."

"I reloaded the gun, and Morris looked carefully to his. Then we seated ourselves to wait. He was in one of the easy chairs, and I returned to the bed, after removing the incumbrances. Presently we both dozed off, I suppose. Anyhow, the lights went out suddenly, waking me. At the same instant I heard a scream—a regular scream, as if some one was in awful agony, and with it came a slamming of doors in the room. Gee! how I jumped for that switch."

"You turned on the lights?"

"Yes. And when I did so all three of the bolted doors were swinging open, as if they had never been locked in the world, and somebody was pounding with a sledge-hammer out in the hall—at least, that was how it sounded.

"I jumped for the door nearest the sound, and either tripped on something or something caught my foot; anyhow, I went sprawling across the floor, with my head through the doorway, to the accompaniment of a loud laugh.

"Say, Nick, it was like getting mad over a telephone, when Central sasses you. There isn't a thing to do but swallow hard. There wasn't anything to hit, there wasn't a thing to shoot at, save the walls of the rooms, or the pictures."

"And they must be rather considerably marred up already, judging from all that you have told me about your own experiences, and others, in that room."

"They look as if they were relics from the battle of Gettysburg—and that's no dream."

"Well, did anything more happen that night?"

"No; strange to relate. I dressed. I was through fighting things in my pajamas. I like to have my shoes and trousers on, anyhow. A fellow feels easier, somehow."

"Rather."

"We sat up the remainder of the night. There wasn't much more of it. The rest of my servants left me that morning, and Morris and I were alone again, save for two men at the stable."

"What did you do then?"

"I did the only logical thing that I could think of. I had myself driven down-town, and I called upon one of the most expert architects I know of. I need not mention his name. He said he'd rather I wouldn't."

"All right; but what did you want with an architect?"

"I wanted him to go on a hunt in that house, for secret passages and such things."

"Ah! Now you are getting at it."

"I thought I was, and he thought so, too. I told him the whole story, from beginning to end; and he agreed with me that it was the only solution of the problem. We thought we'd hit it all right, and patted ourselves on the back to beat the band."

"Did he go up there with you?"

"Sure he did. He spent two days there—and one night."

"One night, eh?"

"Yes. That was the reason why he stayed there the next day. It was funny—really; only it was rather trying, too."

"Tell me about it."

"When I told him the story about the house he was not only sure that it was filled with secret passages, but he was positive that he could find them; but after he had searched all of that day, and had not even found a trace of one, he came to the opinion that we were playing a joke on him, or that we were two fools who were easy marks for some other joker, and he volunteered to pass the night with us, and 'lay' the ghost himself. He said he wasn't afraid of ghosts, and that he'd settle them, all right.

"Well, he stayed. I let him sleep in my bed, for that room seemed to be the center of activities. I slept upon the couch, and Morris occupied the easy chair I have mentioned before. That was night before last."

"The night before your last night there, eh?"

"Yes. We all had revolvers ready, and we were resolved to keep awake, and not sleep a single wink. But you know how such things work. The mere straining to keep awake is rather certain to send one to sleep. Anyhow, we did fall asleep, every blessed one of us, and we must have slept a long time, too, before we were disturbed. When I opened my eyes I was tied to the couch so that I couldn't rise; Morris was fastened to his chair in the same manner, and the architect was tied up in the shape of a mummy, at the head of the bed. But that wasn't what interested me."

"What was it, then?"

"Well, if anybody should ask you, you can say that there was an articulated human skeleton doing a can-can and a cake-walk all in one in the middle of the floor of that room, and all the time that architect was yelling bloody murder at the top of his voice. Oh, it was a pleasant little time we were having, Nick. Don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TERRORS OF ONE NIGHT.

"And that brings me down to last night, doesn't it? When I left the house myself, through the window, in my pajamas, followed by Morris in his?" continued Sturtevant, grinning at the detective. "I am making rather a long story of this, I suppose, but it is as well that you should know the whole thing before you go up there to put that ghost, or those ghosts, out of business. And I can afford to grin about it now, Nick, seated here in the security of your study with you, in broad daylight."

"When you have quite finished the story," replied the detective, "I shall ask you to drive me to that house, in your machine, which I see is at the door, and I shall ask you also to be my guide while you show me about the place, from roof to cellar."

"And I suppose you will ask me to remain there with you to-night, to help you to lay the ghost; eh?"

"You may do as you please about that, Roger."

"Well, then, I think I will stay at the Waldorf. I'm rather shy on sleep, these days. I believe that I could put in twelve solid hours, in a room where there are no ghosts."

"All right. You shall have the opportunity to-night. Let me hear the balance of your tale now. Get right down to cases. What happened last night?"

"That's a corker for a question, that is! What happened? What didn't happen? Why, the world came to an end; the ghosts brought bottled-up earthquakes into that house, and chucked 'em at us; they threw in a cyclone or two, by way of variety, and otherwise disported themselves."

"Come, come!"

"When it was getting well along toward dark I asked Morris if he thought he could stick it out one more night, and he said he thought he could, so eventually we

camped in my room and waited. We didn't make any bluffs about concealing our intentions, as we had done so many times before, thinking that we could deceive the ghosts, but we just fixed ourselves to watch in that room."

"Armed, of course?"

"Armed! We each had two guns ready to use. We seated ourselves in chairs, resolved that we wouldn't go to sleep at all; and we left the lights turned on—and we sat there in that way till almost three in the morning, with nothing doing.

"'It's no use,' I told Morris then. 'The ghosts are taking a night out. I am going to bed'; for you must know, Nick, that I was so deadly sleepy that I couldn't keep awake another minute. I haven't had sleep enough since I have lived in that house to make up one read good night of rest."

"I suppose not."

"So I threw off my clothes and got into bed, telling Morris that he could do as he pleased, but as for me, I was that sleepy that even a ghost couldn't wake me. I was asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. I didn't know till afterward that Morris followed my example a few moments later. That is, he took off his clothes, too, and threw himself on the couch in my room."

"Go on."

"When the performance began I was made conscious by being suddenly dumped out on the floor, as if one side of the mattress had been lifted, with me on it, and hurled from the bed. It almost smothered me for a moment. I struggled to my feet somehow, but I hadn't straightened up when I got a biff side of the head that knocked me galley-west again. It must have been a stuffed club, for it didn't hurt me much. When I tried to struggle to my feet a second time, a wet sheet was thrown over my head and somehow wrapped around me, and I was pinned down to the floor, while I could hear my furniture being broken up all around me.

"In the midst of it I heard Morris yell for help, from somewhere across the room, and he kept on yelling for a long time. I knew that they were hurting him, too, or he would not condescend to yell in that manner.

"It seemed to me that while I laid there, all the broken furniture in the room was piled upon me to hold me down. Cries of demoniac laughter, shrieks of pain, yells of rage, groaning, moaning, and all the other human or inhuman noises that you can imagine filled that room. In other parts of the house I could hear things being dragged across the floors. You would have thought, really, that about twenty big men were engaged in wrecking the place—and it looks so now.

"In the meantime, that sheet that had been thrown over my head was made to serve double duty, for presently the furniture was pulled off me, the ends of the sheet were tied together behind me, holes were torn or cut in it so that I was permitted to see through them, and then I was given an exhibition of ghost-vaudeville that would have been the envy of Keith & Proctor.

"There was a cleared place in front of me, and in that space the skeleton I have already mentioned reappeared and did a song and dance—the song in a little, squeaky voice that was like a child's. The act was done in a spot of light that looked like the lime-lights they throw from the galleries in theaters, and it changed from one color to another in the same manner.

"The skeleton danced, and disappeared like you would snap your fingers; then a shrouded figure, that might have been a woman, took its place. Then came another figure that didn't have any head, to begin with, until suddenly, out of the darkness from somewhere, a head sprang into existence, and took its place on the sawed-off neck. Then the red devil showed up—the one I had seen once before, you know.

"Nick, I have told you all this in a half-facetious manner, but I have done that in order to keep up my courage in the telling. The whole thing was frightful, and in the state of nerves to which my former experiences had reduced me, those ghosts finally accomplished what they had set out to do.

"They got me. They drove me half-mad. I lost my nerve and my head at the same time. I discovered all in an instant that I was scared almost to death—and there was no doubt about the reality of it, either.

"I swore at them, cursed at them, screamed at them, begged them to go away. I think I wept, but I am not sure about that. I do know that I presently struggled to such purpose that I tore myself loose from the clinging sheet that was around me, and sprang clear of it, and, as I did so, the lights went out and all the noises ceased, so that it was as still as death in that room.

"I stood for a moment, paralyzed, and then something pushed me so that I almost fell; before I could recover my balance, I was pushed in the opposite direction; then in another one, and presently I was careening from side to side in that room, like a billiard ball—and

every time I was pushed I could hear a low, hissing sound, as if it were made by a serpent.

"Somehow I finally broke away from them again, and I made a run for it, for the window. I reached it, and threw it up; I don't know how, but I did it. When it was open, I jumped through it, and when I struck the soft sod under it, and rolled over and over in the wet grass, nothing ever felt so soft and pleasant to me in all my life.

"I was just getting on my feet, to run—for having given away to terror at last, it had full mastery over me then—when something shot over my head and alighted in a heap just beyond me.

"It was Morris. I needn't detail his experiences. They were just about the same as my own, except that the flesh of his arms had been stuck full of pins, which the ghosts left there when they used them. That was what had made him yell so.

"That's all, Nick. That ends the story. We legged it for the stables, and I have already told you what happened after that. My tale of woe is concluded."

"It is an exceedingly startling story," said the detective seriously. "You have made it rather amusing, Roger, but it has a very serious side. I suppose those people have ruined a good many dollars' worth of property for you, haven't they?"

"I haven't stopped to count them, Nick; but some people would call it a fortune."

"You don't really believe that there was anything supernatural about all you have told me, do you?"

"I don't know what to believe, Nick. I have hammered those walls from the top of the house to the foundations, for secret passages, and found none. I had that architect there, and he made use of all his knowledge of the science, to no purpose. People or ghosts, whichever they were, entered and left that house through closed and bolted doors, without disturbing the fastenings, and they did the same thing with every room inside the house; and it *wasn't* done by the old trick of moving the casing with the door, either, for I looked for that thing.

"They moved about the place at will, and passed through solid walls so quickly that they could escape the sudden turning on of electric lights. Things appeared and disappeared in the middle of rooms as if by magic.

"That articulated-skeleton trick is an old one, and you can see it on the stage any year; but if it was a trick in this instance—how did it get into and out of the room?

"The red devil that I shot at—and which I know I hit—looked like a man; a big man. It might have been a dummy, we will say, for the sake of argument; but even so, how did it get into and out of the room? And how was it apparently animated?

"The shrouded figure and the headless man might have been mechanical arrangements, if on a stage; such things have been done. But how was it done there?"

"All the same, although you have been unable to find secret passages, there *must* be secret passages there."

"There must be if those things are done by human agency; but where are they?"

"Tell me something about the construction of the house, Roger."

"I think you had better go up there with me and see it. I'm not afraid to go there—if I go with you."

"Are the walls paneled, or——"

"Every wall in the house is paneled. There isn't a plastered wall inside it. But I have had panels removed and looked behind them—to find that they are backed by solid walls."

The detective rang his bell, and sent Joseph to summon Chick and Patsy; and when they appeared, he gave each of them a slip of paper, on which he had written a name and a few directions. One of the slips contained the full name of Lemuel Stanton's father; the other contained that of Lemuel himself; and the directions on the slips were that the histories of those men be obtained, with the least possible delay, and as completely as it could be done.

"Now, Roger," he said to his friend, rising and stretching himself, and seizing the opportunity to light a fresh cigar, "if you will take me to your house in your automobile, I will go with you. I want to examine the place thoroughly before I decide what course to take. It isn't a case where I could hope to accomplish much merely by going to the house and remaining overnight, to see what would happen."

"You're right about that."

"You see, the conspirators—for that is what they are—have a person at a disadvantage, when that is attempted. That is precisely what they have prepared for. When this thing was entered into, all such things were thought of, and it is more than likely, even if I were twice as strong and ten times as clever as people say I am, that I would be practically helpless in their

hands, unless I figure out some method of meeting them on their own ground. I must meet cleverness with cleverness. For instance, there isn't a doubt that they know of your visit here now."

"I was going to ask you about that. You used the word conspirators, and now——"

"The whole thing, Roger, is a scheme to get money—as I will prove before I have done with the matter."

"Come, then. If you are ready, we will go there. Come on."

And presently Nick Carter was on his way to the haunted house.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER VISITS THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"You are a very rich man," said the detective to his friend, as they speeded toward the end of the island, where the house was located. "You gave a quarter of a million dollars for that place—in cash, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you suppose it was bought for, in the first place? What do you suppose Stanton gave for it?"

"I don't know."

"Probably twenty-five thousand, at the most. Then he spent possibly twice as much in fixing it up. Let us be really generous in our estimates, and assume that the place cost the old man Stanton, all told, seventy-five thousand—he would still have made a nice pile out of you in a short time; eh?"

"But confound it, the man is rich! What would he want to do that for?"

"You don't know that he is rich; you only think so. You say he has wealth in the new gold country of Nevada. Possibly he has. There are a good many rich men there, and many of them have come East from there; but for every real one there have been a dozen frauds. I am of the opinion that Stanton is one of them."

"Gee, Nick!"

"I mean that he is a sharper; a schemer. That he makes his money by clever practises. You appeared to them in the light of an easy mark. You don't know anything about values. You are worth more money than you know what to do with. You have been passing most of your time abroad. You admired this house, and you told young Stanton about it. Immediately the plot was hatched to buy it, fix it up, and sell it to you at a tremendous profit."

"But I don't see——"

"Wait, and you will. You are romantic. You're not a rounder, in any sense of the word. You are more of the artist. It was known that you admired stories like 'Kenilworth'—stories about houses with secret passages, and all that. Well, when they fixed up the house, they put in a few, or started to; eh? Then the idea grew and grew until—this result."

"But even now I don't see the point."

"First, you admired the place, and said so. It hadn't occurred to you to buy it, and did not occur to you until young Stanton told you that his father had bought it; then you offered on the spot to double what he had given for it, without even knowing what the original sum was."

"That is true."

"They said to themselves: 'Here is a lovely profit for us, like finding it, if we work it right.'"

"Suppose you are right about that much of it, Nick, where is the use of their keeping up the thing? They have already got the quarter-million—what is the use of frightening me out now?"

"My dear Roger, if they can make a fortune out of you, there are also other suckers in the world."

"Thanks, awfully."

"And if they frighten you out, so that you don't want the house, you will sell it for a song. Stanton would have one of his agents buy it back for him from you, for instance, for almost nothing. After a while another man would come along who didn't believe in ghosts, and he would give a price for it; and so it would go on indefinitely, with the Stantons realizing perhaps half a million a year out of that place alone. The haunted-house business is an old game, but I have never known it to be played quite so thoroughly before."

"Do you mean that you are convinced that that is what this is?"

"Yes; and I think we will find that the Stantons are in the same business in other cities. From a hundred thousand to half a million a year out of each city, and with three or four or five cities to operate in, a very handsome income would be the result. Moreover, the thing, followed as a systematic business, is interesting and engaging, as well as profitable. The workmen who make over the houses for the chief conspirator are experts at their craft; they know all about secret passages, and how to conceal them. Secret passages, movable walls, ceilings that will move up and down, floors that

will glide in and out—it would all be very simple, indeed, if one made a business of it."

"I'm glad you think so."

"You told me yourself that, during the repairs on this house, you sought many times to see the inside of it, but was refused."

"Yes."

"Nobody was permitted to enter. You were already interested in the house, and, therefore, the mere refusal to permit you to see it whetted your appetite for it to a marked degree. Now, if the workmen had undertaken that work on that particular house, as novices, they would have made so nearly a botch of it that their secrets would have been discovered at once. But they have doubtless done it many times, and are skilled in that class of work. In the old days in England there used to be a priest who could do that sort of thing wonderfully. No one has ever outdone him since then, and he was the only one of his kind then. But that is the game, Roger. You can feel sure of that."

"But if the apparitions were human, how was it that my bullets didn't kill them?"

"Roger, did you never see the inside workings of a camera-obscura? Did you never see the 'phantom duel,' on the stage at a theater?"

"No."

"They are optical delusions made with mirrors. Your red devil, for instance, did not stand at the foot of your bed, where you thought you saw it, and where you aimed your bullet, but was in an opening in the wall, at some other part of the room, and the reflection of it was thrown where you believed you saw it. Have you never seen a mirage at sea, or on the desert, in your travels?"

"Yes; I have seen mirages, several of them."

"The principle is precisely the same. Mirages are upside-down, but if the rays of the sun through the atmosphere created one more lens, it would straighten them. It is a principle of optics. Your red devil, your headless man, your shrouded figure, and your articulated skeleton were all real enough, only you did not see *them;* you saw the reflection of them."

"Do you mean to tell me that such a reflection can be thrown from a hole in the wall, for instance, into the center of a dark room, such as mine was, and then illumined so that it can be seen?"

"It can be done easily. All that is necessary is to supply something that is opaque at the spot where the reflection is to be thrown, and the thing is done. The 'something' opaque can be created by the burning of an odorless powder which will create enough smoke for the purpose. If it has the suggestion of the smell of sulfur, all the better. A strip of gauze, suspended in the right place, and easily removed in an instant, will also supply the purpose. After that there are only mirrors, and reflectors, and a few small but strong lights necessary, and the thing is done."

"It all sounds easy enough, to hear you tell it, Nick, but if you had been in that house——"

"I wasn't; but I will be. But when I am I must be prepared to meet their tricks with others for which they are not prepared."

"But all that tying up, when we were asleep, and other things of the sort; eh?"

"Two or three or more men could have done all that easily enough. You were tied so that you couldn't really hurt any of them with your pistols and other things. A little chloroform, carefully administered while you slept, would enable them to make all their preparations with ease. And another thing, you weren't greatly molested until after you had passed a great many comparatively sleepless nights, waiting for the ghosts. You were in a condition where you dropped off to sleep easily, and slept heavily when once you were asleep. Do you know what I told my assistants to do?"

"No."

"I sent them to get the records of the two Stantons. I don't know that they will find out very much, but Chick and Patsy are pretty thorough."

"What are you going to do yourself, Nick? Are you going to stay in the house to-night?"

"No. And I am not even going to search for secret passages, movable walls, and all that."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll answer that question after I have examined the house."

They rode on in silence after that, each immersed in his own thoughts, and at last they turned into the lane that led to the house, and presently drove into the spacious grounds surrounding it.

It was, indeed, an interesting place; a rambling old house, of imported bricks, as has been said, it covered almost an acre of ground, and was only two stories and an attic in height.

Nick was prepared for a picturesque interior, but he was amazed, nevertheless, for the old mansion was superb.

Space may not be spared here in which to describe it, but the idea of an old baronial hall had been perfectly reproduced. The rooms were immense in size; the panelings were of old, quartered oak, or walnut, or mahogany. The ceilings were lofty, and were also of wood, and decorated with magnificent carvings.

The furniture was on a similar scale. Every appointment of the place, in fact, was in keeping with the idea that had fathered it, and whatever else old man Stanton might be, he was certainly a master at the craft of decoration and finish.

Nick had told Sturtevant, before entering the house, that they would not indulge in any talking while they were inside it, and that if he chose to make any remarks himself Sturtevant must understand that they were intended for ears that might be listening, and were not to be answered, save in monosyllables.

And so they passed through the house, from room to room, and from attic to cellar, and the silence of the place was broken only by their footfalls on the hardwood floors, by the occasional poundings upon the walls, which Nick did for the sake of appearances, and by the remarks that he now and then made, to which Sturtevant responded with a "yes" or a "no," as the occasion required.

Once the detective remarked:

"If you had an architect search this place for secret passages, and he could find none, there would seem to be little use in my attempting it."

Again he said:

"I think, if we should put about a score of men in here, with instructions to keep flash-lights ready for use, the ghosts would give up the job after a while."

Again:

"The ghosts can snap out electric lights with ease; it would be different with lamps and pocket-torches. I think you had better decide to return here to-morrow, and live here, Roger. I will fix up some kerosene-lamps on the walls, and place a few candles where they will burn all night. Then I will send a few men to keep you company. Yes; I think that is what we will do."

The detective was not inside the house above an hour, when he announced that he was ready to depart; and he had done no more than to walk through it, with an occasional tap against the walls as he passed them.

But, nevertheless, when he was again in the open, and they were entering the automobile, he said quietly to his companion:

"I think I have hit upon a way to catch them, Roger."

"You *have?*"

"Yes. If you have got the nerve to play your part—you and Morris."

"Oh, we'll do that. We've got the nerve, if you say so."

"In that case, I think I will send you back here this very night."

"Alone? Without you?"

"Oh, I'll provide you with a sufficient guard, Roger."

CHAPTER IX.

PREPARING A TRAP FOR THE GHOSTS.

During the drive down-town, Nick was strangely silent, for he was thinking out the details of the plan he had decided upon.

With Sturtevant's permission, he had taken the seat under the wheel, and he presently guided it into a side street, and finally brought it to a stop before a sign which read, "Thomas Glynn, Contractor," where he was presently engaged in an earnest and low-toned conversation with Mr. Glynn; and if you had been looking on at that conversation, as Sturtevant did, without being able to overhear a word of it, you would have wondered at the broadness of the grins which swept over the face of the contractor while the detective talked to him.

Several times he laughed outright, and his laugh was worth hearing, too. He nodded his head frequently, and rubbed his hands together, as if he were enjoying that talk. Sometimes he swore softly, as one well pleased, and without the least intention or suggestion of profanity; and all the time he rolled a huge cigar around from one corner of his mouth to the other, in very evident glee.

At last Nick called Sturtevant to him.

"Roger," he said, "this is Mr. Glynn—an old friend of mine, and one of the best fellows that ever lived. Mr. Glynn, Mr. Sturtevant, the gentleman who owns the house I have been describing to you. Now, Roger?"

"Well, Nick, what is it?"

"I want you to tell Mr. Glynn that he is to carry out the directions I have given him, and to assure him that, if he succeeds, he shall have five hundred dollars extra for his success. Also tell him that his men shall get triple pay for every hour of work they put in up there."

"You may consider it said, Mr. Glynn. Shall I give him something down, Nick?"

"Yes. Give him a couple of hundred for expenses. He has got to purchase some supplies."

"Here you are, Mr. Glynn," said Roger. "I don't in the least know what Mr. Carter has said to you, but whatever he says goes."

"Now, Tom," said the detective, "can I rely upon you to do exactly as I have directed?"

"You can."

"How soon can you get to the house yourself, now, with a few men along with you?"

"Inside of two hours, I think. I'll make a try for it, anyhow."

"All right. I leave everything in your hands. You know exactly what to do?"

"I do."

"Mr. Sturtevant and his valet will show up at the house before dark."

"I'll be there. We can't get everything in readiness for to-night, of course, but it will all be ready for to-morrow night. You can bank on that."

"I think that is all, then. I'll see you later, Tom."

Again in the automobile, Sturtevant turned a puzzled face to the detective.

"Will you tell me about it?" he asked.

"I'll tell you part of it. It is best that, for the present, you should not know it all."

"Well, tell me all you can, for I confess that I am curious."

"Glynn is going to your house to put up some bracket-lamps and some other fixtures that I have directed. I kept the key when we came away, and I have given it to him."

"That's all right."

"He has instructions from me exactly what to do, and he will do exactly as I have directed."

"But what is it?"

"Bracket-lamps, for one thing; and that is all you need know for the present."

"But——"

"To-night you and Morris will remain in the house, as usual, only that Glynn and some of his men will be there with you. They will work far into the night; probably all night, and they will talk while they work. You are to let them talk all they please, and express no surprise at what you may hear them say."

"All right."

"Also, you are not to question them about anything you may see them doing. You are, in fact, to pay absolutely no attention to them, but go about your habits as you always do, and, when the proper time comes, retire as usual. It is a safe proposition that the ghosts won't bother you to-night."

"Why not?"

"Because there will be too many men working around there, and too much doing. Too many lights, also."

"What am I to do?"

"Remain perfectly passive, nothing more. Pay no attention to what is being done around you."

"Where will you be all this time, Nick?"

"I haven't decided about that yet. If it is necessary, I won't be far away from you."

"I don't see why in thunder you can't take me into your confidence. I don't see the occasion for so much mystery," said Sturtevant petulantly.

"We must meet mystery with more mystery. If you knew what I think I know now, you would wear a self-satisfied smirk that would be almost fatal to my plans. You must be patient."

"I'd like to ask you a question."

"You may ask anything you like, only I won't promise to answer everything you ask. What is that particular question?"

"Is your friend, the contractor, going to tear down any walls, looking for secret passages, and all that?"

"No; he isn't going to tear down a thing."

"What *is* he going to do?"

"He is going to put up a few things."

"What sort of things?"

"I have just told you; bracket-lamps, candles, and so forth."

"What does the 'and so forth' mean?"

"I won't tell you that now."

"Is Glynn going to stay there all night?"

"Yes."

"And some of his men, also?"

"A half-dozen of them, at least; possibly more."

"Nick," said Sturtevant calmly, after a short pause following upon the answer to the last question, "I am going to strike."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'm not going to stay in that house to-night, or any old night, not if there are a hundred men in it to keep watch, unless you are one of the hundred. If you will

stay there with me, I'll stay; but unless you do—unless you promise me now that you will stay there with me, I'll take the evening train out of town, and the whole thing can go hang, for all of me!"

The detective laughed aloud.

"All right," he said at once. "I will make the promise. I'll stay there, and sleep in the room with you, if you like, on the couch."

"Then that's settled. What shall we do in the meantime?"

"I suggest that you drop me at my home, and then go on yourself and find your man Morris. Tell him of the new arrangement, and prepare him for what is coming. But don't tell him any more than you have to."

"I couldn't tell him if I tried, for the reason that you haven't told me anything."

"Well, it is best not to."

"I had hoped to have one night of sleep," Sturtevant said, with a sigh, presently.

"You will have it, all right. There won't be any ghosts there to-night."

"How do you know that?"

"There will be too much going on inside the house, I tell you."

"Oh! All right. When shall I see you again?"

"I'll dine with you at the Racquet Club, at seven, and then we'll go to the house together."

"That's agreed, is it?"

"Yes."

Nick did not remain in his house long, but came out directly, and did some shopping on his own account; and when he met Sturtevant at the club that evening, he carried a small satchel in his hand.

"You needn't have brought your dry-goods with you," said Sturtevant. "I have plenty."

"I suppose so. But these aren't exactly dry-goods. They are part of the plot."

"Eh? Is that so? What are they?"

"You will know in good time."

"More mystery. Gee, but I am tired to death of mysteries."

"Where is Morris?" asked the detective.

"I sent him on ahead. I told him that the house was filled with workmen, and that he had no occasion to fear anything. At first he refused to go to the house at all again, but when I told him that you were going to be there, it was all right. He thinks that the ghost will be laid to-night, for sure."

"It won't be laid to-night, nor to-morrow night, Roger; and possibly not for several nights to come—but it will be laid finally."

"Oh, I haven't a doubt of that, since you have taken hold of the matter. Only I would like to know how you are going to do it."

When they arrived at the house, two hours later, it was dark, of course; but the house itself was brilliant with electric lights, and with lamps that the workmen were adjusting.

"Have you had any trouble?" Nick asked the contractor, when he had drawn him aside.

"A little; not much. At first some of our tools disappeared mysteriously. We have lost a few lamps, and little things of that kind; but nothing to amount to anything."

"You have fixed things so that the men will keep busy all night, have you?"

"Yes."

"And there will be at least one man in every room?"

"Two; two in each room of the house, with the lights turned on, and the lamps lighted, besides. The house looks like a torch-light procession, Mr. Carter."

"Have you or any of the men heard noises, or seen anything, since you came here?"

"Some of the men have heard groans in the walls and other noises of that sort. One of my men was badly scared just before dark."

"How was that?"

"All the lights had not been turned on, and he went into a room to light up, where there was not much brilliancy. He says he was half-way across it, when something from behind gave him a shove that sent him clear across the room; but when he jumped up and turned around, there wasn't a thing to be seen, and the door was closed, just as he had left it."

"Was he frightened?"

"Yes, at first. But I had told him all about what you think it is, and after I had talked to him again he was all right."

"Nobody has heard or seen anything very lately, eh?"

"No; not even the groans inside the walls."

"Good! I think they will let us alone to-night—and that is what I wish them to do. If they will only hold off long enough to let us finish the work in peace, we'll set a trap for them that will catch the lot beautifully."

"I believe you will, Mr. Carter."

CHAPTER X.

THE GHOSTS WIN FIRST BLOOD.

Nick, in company with the contractor, passed from room to room of the house, until he had finished with all of them, and then the two men returned to the library, where they seated themselves to smoke. Sturtevant, with Morris, had gone to his own room, and retired, saying that, because he felt quite secure, he was going to put in all the sleep he could get, for the one night, at least.

From where the detective and the contractor were seated they could hear the noises made by the men while they worked, and for a time they listened to these signs and evidences of activity in silence.

"Sounds like business, doesn't it?" said the detective, at last.

"Yes," assented the contractor.

"I see that they have finished with this room, and also with Mr. Sturtevant's."

"Yes; I finished those up at once, as you directed me to do."

"How many men have you got in the house, altogether?"

"Thirty-two. Not counting myself."

"Of course, in regard to the things we are to put up, you have not used any of the real stuff yet, have you?"

"Certainly not. Only the fixtures and brackets; the tubes and the other things you spoke about."

"But the men must be rapidly getting those in place, Tom."

"They are."

"I mean that it sounds to me as if there was less noise in the house than there was a little while ago."

"Possibly there is."

"Listen! Don't you think so?"

"I don't know but I do."

"Don't you think that it sounds uncommonly still all of a sudden?"

"Blowed if I don't, Mr. Carter!"

"I suppose the men are taking it easy, and it has happened that they have all stopped for a moment at the same time."

But Glynn was listening, and did not reply. Presently he remarked:

"I don't like it, Mr. Carter."

"Don't like what?"

"The silence."

"Suppose we make another round among the men, Tom?" suggested the detective, rising.

"I was about to make that suggestion myself. Come on," was the reply, and they started.

They could hear hammering in three of the rooms on the ground floor as they stepped out upon the hallway, and as the bottom of the stairs was near them, they passed to the second floor, with the contractor leading.

At the top of the stairs he stopped still, and turned a puzzled face toward the detective, for there was not a sound to be heard on that floor, whereas there should have been noises from every room there, save the three that comprised the private suite of Roger Sturtevant.

"What the blazes does it mean?" asked Glynn. "What's the matter with the men, anyhow? Why ain't they working?"

"You tell me," replied Nick, smiling. "As we are here, let us find out."

They crossed the upper hall, and threw open the door of one of the large guest-chambers, expecting, naturally, to find it brilliantly lighted, and at least two, and probably three, men at work inside; but the room was in total darkness, and they could hear and see nothing.

Nick stepped forward quickly, and switched on the electric lights—and then they saw that the room was empty. There were no men there.

"It beats the devil!" said Tom savagely; and he turned about and ran toward the door of another room, throwing it open as he had done with the first, and, as in that case, discovering not only that the room was dark, but that it was unoccupied. The men who had been working there were gone.

The detective, in the meantime, had darted to another door, and then on and on, until he had opened every door on that floor, save the three of the suite already mentioned. In every case the lights had been turned off, and the men who had been working in the rooms had disappeared.

"Something must have happened to give them a scare, and they have gone down to the lower floor," said Glynn; and he was starting for the stairs again, when Nick put out his hand and detained him.

"Wait," he said. "Listen."

"What for?" asked Glynn.

"The pounding down-stairs has stopped since we came up here."

"So it has."

"Tom, I think the ghosts are stealing a march on us."

The contractor's face became as white as chalk, and for a moment he breathed hard.

"You don't mean to say that they have carried off my men bodily, do you?" he gasped.

"It begins to look as if that is what has happened."

Nick started down the stairs then, three at a time, fairly leaping to the ground floor of the house, and closely followed by Glynn, who was now as frightened as ever an inmate of the mansion had been.

And Nick ran from room to room on the ground floor, finding in each case, as he had done in the case of the second floor, that the lights were turned off and the rooms were deserted. The men had gone—mysteriously enough, unless something had frightened them so that they had left the house in a body.

"Come!" exclaimed the detective then; and he led the way at a run to the second floor again, making straight for the main door of Sturtevant's suite, for if the spirits, human or otherwise, who infested that house had carried off all the workmen, it followed that they had as likely taken Sturtevant and his valet along with them.

And so it proved.

When they entered the room where Sturtevant had retired to sleep, feeling perfectly secure, they found that the bed was vacant.

Sturtevant had disappeared, and with him had gone his valet, who had been resting in one of the adjoining rooms.

Nor was there a trace of them anywhere to be seen; and Nick and the contractor stared into each other's faces blankly, until the detective finally broke into a laugh which greatly relieved the strain of the situation.

Glynn regarded the detective in horror for a moment. To him the idea of laughter at such a time was almost sacrilegious. He was frightened.

For a moment he stared; then he turned, and would have bolted, had not the detective caught and held him in time.

"Where are you going, Tom? What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm going to get out of here as quick as my legs will take me," was the shivering reply.

"But why? They haven't got us, have they?"

"No; but they'll come back after us."

"I only hope they will do that," said Nick grimly.

"I don't."

"I don't think they will bother us, Tom. We are here in the light, and we are on our guard, too."

"Weren't the other men in the light as much as we are? And weren't there thirty-two of them?" demanded the contractor.

The questions were unanswerable, save in the affirmative, and Nick did not reply. He saw that Glynn was frightened, but he also knew that he would recover from the worst of his fright presently.

"Tom!" he said sharply. They were standing in the upper hall, just outside the door of Sturtevant's rooms.

"Yes," was the reply; and the contractor shivered as with the cold.

"Don't you remember what I told you, down at your office?" demanded the detective.

"Yes."

"And how you laughed at it, and at the fun we'd have when we had our plans perfected?"

"Yes."

"Don't you remember that you said you would not miss the fun of it for a thousand dollars?"

"I do."

"Then are you going to flunk on me now, and desert me when I want you most, Tom?"

"But look here, Mr. Carter. This business ain't natural. No, it ain't! You said that the ghosts in this house were just common men, and that if I'd buy the——"

"Hush, Tom. I'll finish that sentence for you. I told you that if you'd see the thing out, and do as I directed, you'd be well paid for it. You have made a contract. You have the reputation of always living up to your contracts. Are you going to break this one?"

"No; I'm not."

"Good! That's what I thought."

"Not if the bloody ghosts kill me."

"Good again, Tom!"

"But I like to fight things that I can see."

"And so do I."

"Thirty-two men; counting Mr. Sturtevant and his servant, thirty-four of them; and if they get us it will be thirty-six," muttered Glynn so dolorously that Nick laughed.

"They won't get us," he said.

"Why not, I'd like to know? Ain't they carried off thirt——"

"You have forgotten, Tom, that there in no case was there more than three men in a room; and in most instances there were only two, and that——"

"We're only two ourselves, Mr. Carter."

"And that in each case those men were at work in rooms by themselves, so that they could be attacked from behind easily, while noises they made were not apt to be heard by others."

"Well?"

"Tom, we have got to fight this thing out alone now."

"I don't see how."

"We must complete the preparations the men were making. You know in most cases they were only killing time. That was part of my plan."

"Yes; I know."

"We can complete what they were doing—what they intended to take all day to-morrow to accomplish—in two hours, I think. Don't you?"

"We could easily, if we were left alone. But the minute our backs are turned them ghosts will creep upon us, and——"

Nick drew his companion to the center of the wide hall, and then, leaning forward toward him, he whispered in his ear:

"Is everything here, Tom? Everything that I ordered?"

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

"Where did you put it all?"

"The ammonia, the Scotch snuff, and cayenne pepper, the hose, pump, tank, and all, are in the stable, where you told me to put them."

"That is all right, then. Now, Tom, we have a lot of work to do—a lot of it; but first we must visit every room in the house again, to see if the arrangements in each one are complete. When we have done that, we will adjust the pump and the other things, and then we will see—what we will see!"

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER SPRINGS HIS LITTLE TRAP.

Perhaps the reader has guessed something of Nick Carter's plan; perhaps he has not done so, and so for the moment we will review the case something after the manner in which he did it after he had heard the completion of Roger Sturtevant's story.

We know, of course, that from the very first moment, Nick realized that the whole collection of incidents which had created the "haunted house idea" was but the working out of a carefully devised and well-executed plot on the part of conspirators against the peace and also the fortune of Sturtevant—and, likewise, he was certain from the first that the old house, in being made over under the direction of the elder Stanton, had been prepared for just this thing.

He had brought expert workmen, trained to that particular business, there with him, and he had directed their efforts to the creation of secret passages, and entrances, and exits, so that every room in the house was rendered practicable for their purposes.

Long experience at that sort of thing had rendered them more than ordinarily expert in their craft, and the result had been, as we have seen, that a system of secret passages had been created which defied even the science of a trained architect to reveal it.

Realizing this, Nick knew that he could not hope to accomplish personally what the architect had failed to do, directly in line with his profession—and so he selected another means than the mere "smelling out" of the passages by arbitrary search for them.

The men who had created them had practised their trade so successfully that they could defy the ordinary rules of construction, when searchers for their secrets resorted to them; and so Nick figured that the conspirators must be met on their own ground, so to speak—that is to say, on the ground of trickery.

He knew that secret passages *did* exist in that house; he knew that entrances to them, and exits from them, were everywhere; he knew that these secrets would defy his best efforts to disclose them; *and he realized that the only way in which he could hope to expose them would be to drive the conspirators out of them just as burrowing creatures are smoked out of their holes in the ground.*

That was why he sought the contractor, Tom Glynn; that was why he held the whispered consultation with him at his office; that was why he secretly instructed him to purchase considerable quantities of the strongest ammonia, Scotch snuff, cayenne pepper, and the rubber tubing which Glynn had referred to as hose, the tank, and the other articles enumerated.

The pump was of the improved French pattern that had lately been adopted by the Board of Health; the tubes and the tank belonged with it; the ammonia, and snuff, and pepper were to be used as substitutes for sulfur, phenyle, and other disinfectants.

The Board of Health made use of the apparatus to kill disease germs; Nick intended to make use of it to drive out any living thing that might be concealed within the walls of that house into the open

When Nick engaged the contractor to take his men to the house to make the necessary preparations for his plan, he realized that he must somehow hoodwink the people who were concealed in the walls concerning his real purpose in having the work done, and so the arrangement of the lamps was thought of.

Bracket lamps and candles with their fixtures, to take the place of the electric lights, which the "ghosts" could turn on and off at will; and the work of adjusting these brackets should hide the real purpose of boring holes through the walls in various places—holes that would be only just large enough to permit the insertion of the rubber tubing.

And the detective had figured that with two ends of tubing piercing the walls from each room of the house, he could, when he was prepared for it, so fill every corner and crevice of those hidden passages with ammonia, and with the fumes of it, and with the snuff, and pepper, that the "ghosts" who were there would not only be half-strangled, but would be made to cough and sneeze so violently, and would be so blinded, that they would be glad to rush into the open and betray themselves, in order to escape the deadly fumes and the convulsions of muscular contraction induced by the two powders.

This, then, was the plan.

Nick had hoped that the presence of the workmen in the house would drive the "ghosts" away for the time being, so that his men could work in peace; but already the "ghosts" had taken the initiative by scaring the workmen off.

Now that the men had fled and that he and Glynn were left alone in the house, to put it figuratively, Nick did not think that an attempt would be made to capture them, for by doing that, the "ghosts" would defeat their own ends, since there would be nobody left to frighten, whereas the scheme on their part now was, undoubtedly, to so terrorize the two who remained in the house that they would flee from it.

"They will probably turn off all the lights in the house while we are gone," said the detective, as he led the way to the stable; "but we can turn them on again."

"Maybe they're not watching us and therefore won't know that we have left the house at all," said the contractor.

"That is a good idea; possibly they won't know it."

And apparently they did not, for when they returned, bearing with them the apparatus and the articles already described, they found that the lights had not been touched, and that the interior of the house remained as they had left it.

Out at the stable, Glynn said to the detective:

"Won't this stuff strangle our own friends, if they are prisoners, as well as the 'ghosts,' Mr. Carter?"

"I suppose it will make them decidedly uncomfortable," replied the detective. "But we can't avoid that; and there isn't any real danger in using it. There isn't enough of it to do any real damage. I merely wish to drive the whole bunch into the open; and this will do it."

"To my own way of thinking, it would drive Satan out of Hades," said Tom.

They returned to the house, bearing their supplies, and for the following two hours they worked indefatigably, and without a suggestion of interruption.

It seemed indeed as if the "ghosts" had departed for the night, and had decided to leave the remaining two men utterly alone; but Nick thought he knew better than that.

He figured it out that the conspirators were themselves arranging for some great coup which they proposed to play upon the two men who remained, and were only awaiting a good opportunity to spring it; and in this he was right, as it proved, although the "ghosts" were never given that opportunity.

From room to room the two men worked—the detective and the contractor, side by side—and they inserted the tubes in the holes that had been prepared for them, and then led the ends across the floor of each room and into the halls, where they were connected with a larger tube. At the bottom of the stairway the two larger tubes were joined together, and then the still greater one led directly to the pump and tank; and all this time the lights were left turned on in every room of the house.

The two tanks that belonged with the pump were placed side by side on the floor of the lower hall near it. One of them had been nearly filled with a mixture of the snuff and pepper, and the other was quite full of ammonia.

At last everything was in readiness.

There was a cock between each tank and the pump, both turned off; but when the arrangements were complete, Nick gave his final instructions to the contractor.

"Now, Tom," he said, "listen attentively to what I tell you."

"Sure," was the reply.

"I am going to leave you here alone with the pump. You are to run this, and you are not to leave it for an in-

stant, unless you are dragged away from it—and I don't think that will happen. Can I depend upon you?"

"You can."

"Now put this mask over your face—so. That is right. That will protect you from the snuff and pepper, and also from the ammonia, should too much of it get in the house itself."

"That's a fine idea. I hadn't thought of that."

"I have another one for myself which I will adjust presently, when I need it. And now——"

"Yes?"

"I am going to leave you, in order to circulate through the house from room to room, to listen at the walls to see if our scheme is working; but I want you to keep working the handle of that pump, never stopping for anything. Will you do that?"

"You bet I will."

"It will take just five minutes to empty the snuff tank. See, I have turned on the cock."

"I see."

"Pump on that like mad, for five minutes, as soon as I leave you."

"Yes."

"And as soon as the five minutes are up, turn off this cock, and turn on *this* one—the ammonia; see?"

"Yes."

"Then keep pumping until the tank is empty, or until I order you to stop."

"All right. I'll do it. But where will you be all the time?"

"I'll be somewhere near you. You see, Tom, we are going to drive those fellows out of their hiding-places, like rats out of a hole. They will rush into these rooms from every conceivable place. It may be that you will see the walls open, or slide back, or disappear; but no matter what happens, you must not leave the pump."

"I won't."

"And you must not permit yourself to be frightened, no matter what you see."

"I won't."

"I haven't a doubt that they will be dressed in all sorts of costumes. I think they have been fixing themselves up to give us a final scare. Red devils, blue devils, skeletons, goblins, grotesque shapes of all kinds, serpents, snakes—fake ones, of course—*anything* at all, may rush from the walls, and down those stairs; but they will be more eager to reach the open air than to molest you, so have no fear."

"I won't; but, holy Moses, Mr. Carter, I'll sure think I've got the jims with all those things rushing around me."

"That isn't unlikely. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Pump, then! Pump like mad; and at the end of five minutes turn off this cock and turn on the other one, and continue to pump."

"I understand."

"Don't stop unless I order you to do so, or until both tanks are empty."

"I won't. I won't, so help me!"

"Commence, then; *now!*"

The handle of the pump began to work vigorously under Tom Glynn's muscular arms; the tubes swelled as the snuff and powder were forced through them, and they squirmed like small snakes where they led along the floors.

The detective stood looking on for a moment until he was convinced that everything was working satisfactorily, and then he drew slowly away, and passed up the stairs to the second floor.

He had left all the room doors open, and now he stopped to listen.

After a moment, he smiled, for somewhere in the distance he plainly heard a sneeze.

Then another, and another, and others; then paroxysms of them. They seemed to proceed from the interior of the walls themselves.

Then more sneezing, and much coughing—and some murmurs which sounded like swearing, in the distance. There were suggestions, too, of some sort of a commotion behind the walls.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GHOSTS GET A MOVE ON THEM.

The detective stood with his watch in his hand with his eyes fixed upon the face of it.

At the expiration of five minutes, the pump missed one stroke, and Nick knew that Glynn had paused long enough to turn off the first cock and turn on the second—the one that was connected with the ammonia tank.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes more passed; and then——

Yells and curses that were unmistakable sounded from behind the walls.

The noise of tramping feet, rushing hither and thither, could plainly be heard. These sounds were intermingled with cries of pain and terror, of agony and fright, of anger and dismay.

"Pump, Tom! Pump for all you are worth!" he called out to the contractor; and he himself stepped forward where he could see through the open door into the room that had been occupied by Sturtevant.

As he did so—as he stepped into view of the room, the walls at which he was looking seemed suddenly to have taken wings.

They flew aside in all directions.

Some of them flew upward, others sank out of sight, downward; still others glided aside; some of them shut up like fans; others telescoped into invisible receptacles, and the room into which he was looking became no room at all save for the outside walls, and even the paneling in front of them disappeared with the other, leaving spaces behind them along which a man might easily walk.

The detective had already adjusted his mask, and it was well he had, for as he ran to other rooms and looked into them, he saw that the walls of all of them had fallen aside, as they had in that first one, and that men were rushing from these openings as if they were pursued by demons.

He could feel the intense cold that is produced by the fumes of ammonia as it evaporates; he could see the almost impalpable mist in the air produced by it; and he knew that but for the mask he had been careful to provide for himself, he must also have been forced to turn and flee, as those ex-ghosts were now doing.

How they did curse, and swear, and cough, and spit, and sneeze, and cry out with agony!

They rubbed their eyes as they fled, and thereby only rendered them worse, and more painful. Some of them groveled upon the floor, believing that they were blinded.

Others thought that they were choking to death, and called upon Heaven to save them from the torture they were enduring.

Before any of the men who were escaping could reach him, Nick turned and descended the stairs on a run, until he stood beside Tom Glynn; but he held in his hand the end of a rope which was stretched across the floor, and with it he tripped every man who attempted to pass.

And as he tripped the first one, he called to Tom to take the rope and use it—to cease pumping and help him with the capture of the men; and then, as the men rushed down the stairs or from the ground-floor rooms and sought to leave the house, they were tripped or knocked down, and the detective threw nooses over them that he had prepared for the purpose.

Not one of them offered the least resistance. Blinded, strangled, frightened as they were, there was no fight left in them, and they fell each an easy prey to the activity of the detective.

Two of them who might have escaped through the door, he knocked senseless with his fist as they were passing; others were roped, as has been described; a few were handcuffed; all fell into captivity.

And when presently the rush had ceased, and the men were lying upon the floor, captured, there were just sixteen of them.

Later two others were found where they had fainted from sheer terror, before they could escape from their hiding-places, and these were added to the number.

They were a grotesque-looking lot.

Nick had guessed correctly when he had surmised that they were engaged in arranging themselves for their great coup. There were devils and goblins among them, as he had thought there would be. The "articulated skeleton" was a man dressed in black from head to foot, and with a skeleton painted in white upon his costume.

There were goblins, hideous-faced monstrosities, things with claws—it looked for a moment as if a freak museum had broken loose and infested the house.

Nick missed Glynn suddenly and, looking around, saw him rolling upon the floor, convulsed with laughter, and during it he dislodged the mask from his face, with the result that he, too, became strangled, and quickly readjusted it.

"Glory be!" he cried out, when he had done that, "but I don't blame 'em any!"

When he was satisfied that no more men would appear, Nick directed Tom to assist him, and together they made their captives perfectly secure, and carried them one by one to the grass outside the house, where they could breathe the pure air, and slowly recover from the effects of the dosing they had received.

And then, followed by the contractor, they searched the once hidden mysteries of that house.

They found that the walls, apparently of solid oak, were merely veneered with it, and were in reality of jointed steel, so made that they closed like fans, or slipped, like the joints of a telescope, one into another, or lifted straight between two others, or dropped between

two, in the same manner—and every one of them moved as noiselessly as silence itself.

Behind these movable partitions there was ample room for men to pass; to ascend or descend from floor to floor. There was almost another house excavated beneath that one, and in a large room that was there Sturtevant and Morris were discovered.

They had been blindfolded and bound. They had not been permitted to see their captors and did not know what had happened to them.

Among the rooms below the house proper they discovered all the theatrical paraphernalia that Nick had suggested to Sturtevant, as a possible explanation of the apparitions that had been shown to him and at which he had fired his pistol.

Among the captives was young Stanton himself, as Nick had suspected would be the case, for he had been among his men to direct them, having gone there to assist, as soon as he was informed through his spies that Sturtevant had applied to Nick Carter to help him.

He was sullen and angry, and had been almost blinded with pepper, almost strangled with the fumes of ammonia, and had been among the first to succumb to Nick Carter's trick. Nick gazed down upon him for a while in silence, then he said to him:

"I will talk to you later, Stanton. I think there is a prison uniform waiting for you. We will see to it that you wear it, too."

Then he went to Sturtevant, who had not escaped the fumes and powder that had been blown through the secret passages by the aid of the force-pump.

Sturtevant laughed heartily, even while he still coughed and sneezed, and felt of his throat furtively, which he said felt as if it had been branded inside with a hot iron.

"Gee, Nick!" he exclaimed, "I thought an ice-plant had caught afire or busted. That ammonia was something frightful; but I knew the moment it began that it was your scheme, and I laughed even while I was almost strangling. It was great. Those devils there didn't know what had happened. They thought that because they had been playing devil so long and so well the devil himself had gotten them finally. What a place this is, eh? Say, Nick, honest Injun, I wouldn't take two millions for it now. I'll make a show place of it. I'll give exhibitions to my friends. I'll show them private theatricals that will make their hair curl. Oh, I'll have the time of my life out of this place. And, say, I'm inclined to let up on Stanton and his pals. I think you had better let them go, old chap."

"You can't do that, Roger," replied the detective. "Chick has just arrived. He came in just now. Patsy was with him. The two have brought their report about the elder Stanton, and his son. I haven't heard it yet, but we'll listen to it together. All that I know about it now is that the Stantons have practised this sort of thing in almost every city where there were rich men to defraud, from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast. It is a sure case of obtaining money by fraud, and they will get from five to ten years each; and their men will all be sent away for a year or more."

"Nobody ever had the nerve to unmask them before, I suppose, eh?"

"Nobody ever happened to think of the ammonia and the pepper, that's all," replied Nick dryly.

"All the same, I'm glad I've had the experience, and glad I've got the house. They can go free for all of me."

"You can spare the money you have paid out; others who have suffered perhaps could not. You have not sold your purchase for a song; others who have suffered did that very thing, doubtless, for that is the way they made their money."

"Well, fix it up to suit yourself. Anyhow, I'll have no end of fun out of this place now."

Chick's and Patsy's report bore out all that Nick had foreseen, and the conspirators were brought to trial finally.

And that ended the case of the Secrets of a Haunted House.

The telephone was made use of at once, and policemen were summoned from the nearest station to take the prisoners away—and for three days the force-pump was used to force air through those secret chambers and passages, to clear them of the snuff and pepper.

Before Glynn went away, Sturtevant called him aside and gave him a roll of money so big that he was perfectly satisfied.

It afterward transpired that his men had been frightened off, two or three at a time, by fearful blows from some unseen cudgel, and had fled without an explanation, satisfied that the house deserved its name of an abode of evil spirits.

THE END.

The next number (566) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "A Mystery in India Ink; or, Nick Carter in Search of a Secret."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, October 26, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(Postage Free.)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

ORMOND G. SMITH, } *Proprietors.*
GEORGE C. SMITH, }

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Walter Wellman, the noted explorer, journalist, and aeronaut, was discussing on the *Carmanian* on the way to America an English aeroplane that had failed.

"The machine," Mr. Wellman said, "is no good, and it never will be any good. Its inventor's excuses for its failure—he blamed the wind, the motor, a loose screw—begged the question as the private did in the Civil War.

"This private escaped from camp one night, visited town, and in returning was waylaid by a sentry.

"'Who goes there?' the sentry called in the darkness.

"'General Grant,' the private answered, in the voice of one who had consumed eleven beers and nine whiskies.

"And thereupon the disgusted sentry knocked the man down with his musket butt.

"'Jim Jobbins,' the sentry exclaimed, recognizing the private as he helped him up, 'how dare you say that you are General Grant?'

"The private tied his handkerchief around his head.

"'Well,' he stammered, 'if you'd do this to General Grant, what wouldn't you have done to Jim Jobbins?'"

When displaying flowers in vases, as on a metal or centertable, one thing ought to be borne in mind, and that is, the plainer the vase the better the flowers will show.

Somebody says that the difference between a vase and a "vahze" is that the latter costs more than $2.50. But a "vahze" that costs $5 or $6 is now called an amphora, and both the "vahze" and the amphora were never intended for use, but to be placed on stands or in niches as evidence that their owner has money to burn. To put flowers in either would spoil the effect of the flowers, for the eye would be attracted by the beauty or material of the receptacle and the flowers would be overshadowed.

To get the best possible effect of flowers, put them in the plainest possible vase or bowl that will not attract attention, then they will be appreciated for themselves and no comparison will be instituted between them and the receptacle that holds them. A double handful of oxeye daisies, black-eyed Susans, rudbeckias, cornflowers, or any other common blossom will show to more advantage in a brown earthern pitcher than in the costliest amphora ever carved out of Parian marble.

The Japanese understand this principle. All their flower-vases are of the plainest possible construction. But the flower-loving Japs go to the opposite extreme in displaying their flowers, and try by judicious arrangement to get the best possible results from very few flowers. They seldom display more than half a dozen flowers in a vase, and try always to have more foliage than bloom, making green the predominant color, thus setting off to the best advantage the tint of the flower against a neutral background. That, however, is a matter of taste. A few flowers well displayed give an effect of dainty elegance. Americans like flowers in the mass, but the good taste of both agrees regarding the simplicity of the vase.

There is in France a famous trunk-maker. His trunks are noted for their lightness, their elegance, and, above all, their strength. Indeed, it is said that his trunks alone will stand, year after year, the onslaught of the American baggage-smasher.

But these trunks—their name is omitted, lest the man be advertised gratuitously—even in France are very expensive, whereas here their price is almost prohibitive, a steamer trunk costing $80, a box trunk $125, and even a hat-box from $30 to $60.

"Why," said a tourist to this great trunk-maker, "why don't you open a factory in the United States? Your goods are known there; the very rich buy them; if you had an American factory and turned them out at a reasonable price your market would soon become immense."

The Frenchman smiled a sour smile.

"Why don't I open an American factory?" he said. "Alas, have I not done so twice? And the result? Failure. You Americans are too smart for me. The first factory I opened had not been running two weeks before all my foremen were hired away by American rivals at double the salary I paid them. I sent over other foremen. They, too, as fast as they arrived, were snapped up. Finally, in despair, I closed my factory.

"But after some years that immense market tempted me again, and I opened another American plant. This time all went well for some months. My French foreman remained faithful, my American workmen mastered all my methods, success had apparently arrived.

"And, lo, all of a sudden every hand in the place resigned. They had all been engaged from the start by a rival. He had put American workmen in to learn my secrets, and he had kept my foremen on in order that those American underlings might be taught.

"No, I can't manufacture trunks in your country. My rivals are too tricky for me."

There is a colonial exhibition going on at Nogent-sur-Marne, a pretty village near Paris, and from it comes a story quite in the Kipling spirit of a strike on the part of

the tame elephants which are a feature of the show. There are twelve of the big beasts, and they are attached to the Indo-Chinese village. As they were supposed to be the tamest elephants in captivity, they were not chained or tied up in any way. To create the illusion of a herd roaming the jungle they were turned loose in a copse surrounded by an unobtrusive barrier when they were not busy doing stunts under direction of their keepers.

Nobody knows what prompted the freak, as the elephants haven't told any one, but one fine day, without warning, the whole herd began trumpeting, and then moved in solid phalanx on the unobtrusive barrier. They went through it as if it was made of jackstraws, and, tramping over the shrubberies and rockeries and butting down numerous "native huts" which were features of the exhibition, they started across country for the Bois de Vincennes, one of the tame forests of Paris, where they proceeded to enjoy themselves as if they were in their native wilds.

They pulled branches of big trees and snapped little ones in two and devoured all the saplings in sight, until their keepers, aided by the employees of the show, made a cordon around them and drove them back to their enclosure with sharp hooks and goads. They were hardly back and the barrier patched up around them when they began trumpeting again. With a rush they once again made their way to liberty, creating havoc as they passsed.

This time the whole village of Nogent turned out as elephant-hunters. When they were surrounded in some meadow-land, the animals showed no sign of temper. They let themselves be driven quietly back to the show. When they got them there the keepers put heavy chains on the feet of all the wanderers.

"The best boy I ever hired," said the store-manager, "was one I chanced to see once sweeping off a sidewalk.

"You know how many boys, and many men, for that matter, sweep a sidewalk. They leave a streak of dirt here and there, make a poor job of it generally, and pay no attention to the passersby. They are slack and indifferent, and they do whatever other work they have to do, you can make up your mind, in just the same way. But this boy that I'm speaking of was making another sort of a job of it.

"He dug into the corners up by the building and made it nice and trim there, and then, working quickly, too, without losing a minute's time, he swept the sidewalk absolutely clean, and at the same time, as he worked, he kept his eyes open, had some thought for other people besides himself and some sense of responsibility. He was a worker and a good worker. You knew he'd do whatever else he had to do in just the same way.

"About three months after that we had occasion to hire another boy, and, curiously enough, as it seemed to me, that boy applied for the job. He didn't need any other recommendation to me than the work I'd seen him doing, sweeping that sidewalk, and we hired him on the spot, and he's been with us ever since, advancing steadily.

"What? No, he isn't a partner yet, but he's getting on; and you can set it down as a simple fact that any boy you see making a good, square job of sweeping off a sidewalk will do well in anything he undertakes."

SOL SLOCUM'S TRAP.

BY J. R. HAMMOND.

"Sol," said old Daniel Reyburn to one of his hired men, or, rather, boys, for he was but a boy either in years or size, though he carried an older head on his shoulders than a great many grown men, "I want you to catch Charley, and put my saddle on him, and be careful about fixing the blanket so it won't hurt his back, and ride over to the post-office and get the mail, and call at the blacksmith's shop and see if them plows are sharpened, and tell the blacksmith to make me a clevis like the one on that two-horse plow, and two lap rings, and be sure to have them ready when I send after the plows. I don't want you to ride Charley hard. You've got plenty of time to get back before night without going out of a walk, and I'll expect you back in time to help about milking and feeding."

Having delivered himself of the above somewhat elaborate instructions, Reyburn walked back into the house, and Sol caught Charley, saddled him, and rode off on his errand.

Now, Sol Slocum, though an orphan, and probably in consequence thereof having no one duly authorized to restrain his little impetuousities, was one of the most irrepressible little imps that ever lived, and previous to his entering Reyburn's service had raised the flag of rebellion and waged open warfare against every family in which he had been employed, and frequently in less than a week, sometimes in less than a day, after entering it.

The very moment a disposition toward coercion, or crowding him, as he termed it—that is, requiring more of him than he thought just and equitable—was manifested by any member of the family, a spirit of insubordination was aroused in his breast, and there was no more peace in that family as long as Sol remained a member of it; but, as a general thing, his obstreperousness procured for him the privilege of departing at once, a privilege that he invariably took advantage of.

Reyburn was well aware of his rebellious disposition when he employed him. In fact, one of his acquaintances, on hearing that he was talking about hiring him, had taken it upon himself to get on his horse and ride five miles to warn him against taking such a "rantankerous little cuss," as he termed him, into his family.

"If you have a moment's peace from the time he enters your family till he leaves it, you will be luckier than any one who has ever employed him yet," said his friend, in conclusion.

We have seen how careful and particular Reyburn was in giving Sol his instructions on sending him on an errand.

This same friend of his who had put himself to so much trouble to warn him against employing Sol, had on a certain occasion employed him himself, and the second day after he came, wanting to send him on an errand, says to him:

"Sol, I want you to catch a horse and go to town, and," do thus and so.

Sol, left to the exercise of his own judgment, took the first bridle and saddle that he came to, selected the best saddle-horse in the lot, and struck out for town. During his absence it was discovered that he had taken John's horse, Bob's saddle, and Mary Ann's bridle, and without

the consent of either, in consequence of which audacity a first-class storm was brewing and ready to burst upon him on his return.

The first explosion he encountered was from John, who met him at the gate in a state of mind bordering on the furious.

"What in thunder are you doing on my horse?" roared the infuriated young man.

"Riding him," said Sol; "don't you see I am?"

"Well, sir," he roared again, "the next time you ride him without my permission, you'll get your head punched."

Putting his thumb to his nose, and twirling his fingers in the young man's face, he rode into the lot, where he encountered Bob, who shouted:

"I'd like to know, sir, what you are doing on my saddle?"

"You're not blind, are you?" said Sol. "Don't you see I'm riding it?"

"Who gave you permission to ride it?" said Bob.

"Nobody."

"Well, sir, the next time you want a saddle let 'nobody' furnish you with one of his own. I don't choose to have Tom, Dick, and Harry riding mine."

On going to supper, Miss Mary Ann informed him in not the most dulcet of tones that she would thank him to let her bridle alone hereafter.

Badgered and browbeaten thus, he would stand on the defensive at first, but long practise had given him a facility at retort, and a mastery of sarcasm, and a volubility of impertinent slang that enabled him speedily to gain a position where he could act on the offensive, when he never lost an opportunity of rendering himself as offensive as possible.

In spite of all the warnings of his friends, and their predictions that he couldn't stand him a month, Reyburn had employed him, and had kept him over a year, and, by kindness, united with firmness and the exercise of good common sense, had bound the boy to him as with hooks of steel.

Returning from the post-office and blacksmith shop, Sol had reached within a mile of home, when, in passing a house, a woman ran out and asked him if he wouldn't go for the doctor for her, as one of her children had just got his leg broken by a fall from a horse, that her husband was away from home and she had nobody she could send.

Knowing if Reyburn was there himself he would not only consent to his going, but be the first to propose sending him, Sol answered without a moment's hesitation that he would go, and, turning his horse about, started for the doctor's house, some five miles off. On reaching there, he was told that the doctor had gone to see a patient some three or four miles still farther off. Though it was now night, he struck out on the doctor's trail, and in the course of an hour or so succeeded in overhauling him.

Once more on the road homeward, he lost no time on the way; still, as he traveled a moderate gait, it was a late hour at night, perhaps midnight, when he reached home.

Putting his horse in the barn and feeding him, he was just in the act of starting to the house when he caught sight of two men sneaking along in the shadow of the barn in the direction of a window that opened into the haymow. Sol drew back so as to conceal himself while watching their motions. Creeping stealthily along, half-bent, close to the side of the barn, as though fearful of being discovered, the foremost one, on reaching a spot directly under the window, straightened himself up, placed his hands on the window-sill, pulled himself up, and disappeared in the haymow. His companion followed immediately after, and both were lost to Sol's view.

"Well," said Sol, after the last one had disappeared in the haymow, "I'd like to know who them fellows are and what they're up to, and I'm going to try to find out."

And, suiting the action to the word, he climbed up on a beam that ran from near where he stood across the barn and jutted out over the haymow in such a way as made it an easy task for him to crawl on his hands and knees to a position where he could overhear every word that might be said, with but little if any danger of being discovered himself.

"Cooning" himself along as noiselessly as a cat, he finally reached the end of the beam without a misstep or misadventure of any kind, where, perching himself, he patiently awaited developments. Some considerable time elapsed before anything was said, and Sol had about come to the conclusion that he was fooling his time away roosting out in the barn on a beam, when he had a good bed at the house—that the men were merely a couple of benighted travelers who had concluded to save a few pennies by lodging in a barn—and was just in the act of beginning a retrograde movement, designed to carry him to the other end of the beam, when he heard one of them ask:

"How long will it be yet?" and he recognized the voice of a sinister-looking fellow who had recently been in Reyburn's employ.

"Two or three hours, I guess," was the answer.

Sol's idea of a retrograde movement was abandoned for the present. Curiosity prompted him to remain, at least long enough to find out what it was that was expected to transpire in two or three hours.

"I wish," continued the first speaker, "the thing was over with."

"What?" replied the other. "You're not scared nor nothing?"

"No, I'm not scared, but I'd a great deal rather be counting the money than laying here thinking over the murders that have to be committed before it can be reached. Say what you will, this thing of murdering an old man and an old woman in cold blood, who, had they been my own father and mother, could not have been kinder to me than Reyburn and his wife were, is an ugly business. Sol Slocum, too, though a wild little cuss, is as good-hearted a boy as ever lived."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the other, somewhat contemptuously, "you're green at the business yet. Wait till you've killed as many in cold blood as I have, and you won't mind such a job as we have on hand now any more than eating when you're hungry. You think there's no mistake about the money?"

"I know there's no mistake. There may have been some change since I left; but I saw the man pay him five thousand dollars, saw it counted, saw him put it in his trunk, and heard him say that he hadn't confidence enough in the bank to deposit it there, and that he should be his own banker until he could meet with an opportunity of investing it. Recollect that I don't vouch for the money being there now, only that I saw it put there; and if after killing Reyburn and his wife and boy, the money

can't be found, you mustn't go back on me on that account. I'm not responsible for its removal."

Had Sol's hair been of the sort that on terrifically thrilling occasions involuntarily erects itself like quills on the "fretful porcupine's" back, here was a first-rate opportunity for a display of that kind; but his mind was so intently occupied during this diabolical conversation in devising ways and means for thwarting the scheme of these cold-blooded murderers and robbers that, though the opportunity presented itself, he failed to profit by it.

Slowly, cautiously, noiselessly as any member of the feline persuasion could have accomplished the task, he worked himself back to the other end of the beam, dropped to the floor, crept out of the barn, and then went in a brisk run up to the house. Gliding into the house as stealthily as he had crept out of the barn, he made his way to where Reyburn's double-barrel shotgun was hanging, took it down, and slipped out again without disturbing any of the inmates, and then hurried back to the barn.

Now, right underneath the window through which the robbers had crawled into the barn, was a large cistern some twelve feet deep, and with about five feet of water in it. It was covered with a trap-door some five feet square, made of oak plank. Sol raised this trap-door from over the mouth of the cistern, and propped it up on the far side from the barn in such a way that when the robbers went to jump from the barn window, should they chance to overleap the cistern, it would catch them and cause them to slide back into the cistern. This he did in so noiseless a manner as not to attract the attention of the robbers, who were lying within a few feet of him and almost directly over his head.

The next thing was to give them a big scare, so as to cause them both to jump from the window simultaneously, thereby increasing the chances of precipitating themselves into the cistern. To this end Sol worked his way to a point where he knew he could be easily heard by the robbers, and commenced talking in a low tone of voice, as if engaged in conversation with some one. Presently he heard one of the men say:

"What's that? Don't you hear somebody talking?"

As soon as he found out he had attracted their attention, and was satisfied they were listening, Sol said, in a louder tone of voice:

"I know they're here, because I heard them laying their plans, which were to murder you, and Mrs. Reyburn, and me, and as many more as they might think necessary to accomplish their designs, and then rob the house. You take the shotgun and go round to the corner of the barn, and when they run out at the door, shoot them. I'll take the revolver and climb up here, and plug one of them as he lies, if I can."

Making a movement as if to carry this plan into execution, the robbers sprang to their feet, simultaneously rushed to the window and leaped out, side by side, neither waiting to give the other precedence; and just as Sol emerged from the barn he had the satisfaction of seeing two heads disappear down the cistern, and the next moment of hearing a splash at the bottom.

Stationing himself within a few feet of the mouth of the cistern, Sol waited in silence the issue of events. At first all was silent as the grave. No sound issuing from the depths of the cistern broke upon the stillness of the midnight air. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and not a movement or a whisper could be heard. Sol began to think maybe they were both drowned. But the thought didn't disturb his equanimity to a perceptible extent. With his shotgun on his knee and his eye riveted on the mouth of the cistern, he sat motionless as a statue.

After the lapse of some fifteen or twenty minutes sounds began to be heard, faint and indistinct at first, then louder and more distinct, shaping themselves into curses at their luck and plans for their escape. After some discussion following a suggestion of one of them that the other should take him on his shoulders and raise him so that he could reach the top of the cistern with his hands, when he could draw himself up, and then let something down for the other to come up on, the other finally consented, and a moment after a pair of brawny hands were seen to grasp the top of the cistern, immediately followed by a head projecting itself above the top.

"Stop there," said Sol, at the same time poking the muzzle of his shotgun to within a few inches of the fellow's right eye, inquiring of him as he did so if his brains were of any value to him. "Because," said he, "if they are, they are a good deal safer down below than they are up here."

The head dropped back more suddenly than it had been elevated. Some two hours now elapsed, without a second attempt at escape being made, but Sol was still on the alert, with his eye fixed on the mouth of the cistern and his finger on the trigger of his shotgun.

Suddenly, and without previous warning, he saw a single hand fasten itself on the top of the cistern, and then, quick almost as a flash, another hand was projected in which was clutched a revolver; but the next moment an explosion was heard, and the revolver fell from the shattered hand of the robber back into the cistern, followed a moment later by the owner.

The object of the fellow, as he afterward acknowledged, was to raise himself sufficiently to get sight of whoever was standing guard over the cistern and fire his revolver at him, provided it would go off, and if it missed fire, throw it at his head before he had recovered from his surprise, and then draw himself out of the cistern and finish him. We have seen how he had miscalculated the vigilance of his guard.

No further attempt at escape was made. The night waned away, and the morning dawned and found Sol in the same state of watchfulness.

Great was the surprise of old man Reyburn, who had experienced considerable uneasiness on account of Sol's failing to return the night before, when, on going down to the barn in the morning, he saw him sitting near the cistern in the position we have described, and still greater when made acquainted with the circumstances narrated above.

As the fellows were already as wet as water could make them, it was thought best to leave them in soak until the authorities were notified of the circumstances, and let them take charge of them where they were.

On being released from their trap, it was discovered that one of them was a noted desperado, bank-robber, and murderer, for whose apprehension a thousand dollars reward had been offered, and which was soon after awarded and paid over to Sol Slocum.

Notwithstanding this windfall, Sol continued to make Reyburn's his home, and finally married one of the old man's daughter, and settled down as quiet, steady, and prosperous a farmer and as good a husband as can be found.

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

No other detective stories are half as interesting as those that appear in this publication. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest numbers from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

539—The Woman of the Mask; or, Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot; or, Nick Carter Springs a Surprise.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King; or, Nick Carter Downs the Yeggman.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast; or, Nick Carter's Very Slender Clue.
549—The House of Secrets; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Vigil.
550—The Lost Bank President; or, Nick Carter Takes a Great Big Chance.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot; or, Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.
552—The Dare-devil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue.
553—A Mystery From the Klondyke; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.
554—Returned From the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the "Brown Chet" Outfit.
556—A Bad Man of Montana; or, Nick Carter's Chase of an Outlaw.
557—The Man From Arizona; or, Nick Carter Swims to Victory.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand; or, Nick Carter in Dangerous Surroundings.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist; or, Nick Carter's Bravest Act.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move; or, Nick Carter's Timely Interference.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Friend, Olga.
562—A White House Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Case For The President.
563—The Great Spy System; or, Nick Carter's Promise to the President.
564—The Last of Mustushimi; or, Nick Carter's Narrowest Escape.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Ghost.
566—A Mystery in India Ink; or, Nick Carter in Search of a Secret.
567—The Plot of the Stantons; or, Nick Carter Prevents the Theft of a Fortune.
568—The Criminal Trust; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Client.

If you want any back numbers of this publication and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.